

**BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION:
A STUDY FOR CONGREGATIONS**

**A Professional Project
presented to
the Faculty of the
Claremont School of Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry**

**by
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This professional project, completed by

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ABSTRACT

Biblical Authority and Interpretation:

A Study for Congregations

by

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Christians today hold a wide range of opinions regarding the authority of the Bible, that is, how much influence they consider the Bible to have, and how that influence functions. Christians also vary greatly in how they interpret the Bible. Most Christians are aware of these differences regarding the Bible, but few understand the complexity of the issues. Congregations need a study designed especially for them that would help them understand biblical authority and interpretation, and perhaps help them clarify or expand their own positions regarding these issues.

"Biblical Authority and Interpretation: A Study for Congregations" is a study series that presents six different approaches to the Bible held by six important theologians. The approaches are not the only ones, not even the most contemporary ones, but they do offer a range of positions and, because they were held by distinguished Christian thinkers of the past, they will have personal credibility for many Christians today. The positions and theologians studied in these lessons are Pope Gregory I, Martin Luther, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Benjamin B. Warfield, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich.

The beginning lesson of this series defines the terms *authority* and *interpretation* and includes a questionnaire to determine where class participants stand on several questions involving those issues. Lessons 2 through 7 deal with the six theologians, each lesson offering biographical material as well as the theologian's position regarding scripture. There are questions for discussion and suggested tasks accompanying each lesson. Handouts containing sermons of each theologian are used to illustrate his style and approach to scripture, and to make the theologian "come alive" for the class members. The

final lesson reviews the various approaches to scripture and then spends time in discussion of how particular approaches might respond to a social issue of today.

It is hoped that this study will interest those who are ambivalent about the Bible, will soften those who hold their view of scripture with rigidity, will help class members value the lives and thinking of the theologians under study, and will open the minds and hearts of all to appreciate more fully the mystery and wonder of God's gift of the Bible.

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I dedicate this project to my parents, Violet Weeks Miller and the late Maynard M. Miller. Together they showed me what it means to have a healthy respect for the Bible and a lively willingness to explore its message creatively.

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INTRODUCTION

Christian congregations usually agree that the Bible is important. But there is considerable disagreement in the way people understand the Bible and considerable difference in the way people allow it to influence their lives. Some view the Bible as inerrant in all its details and as directly applicable to every aspect of their world today. Others argue that scripture is a record of human experience with God; thus the more important stories and themes may speak to today whereas less significant details should be ignored. Some church members read newspaper accounts of the Jesus Seminar and become alarmed; on the other hand, others wonder why the pastor is upset because few come to Church School to engage in serious Bible study. Then there is the fact that people taking opposite sides of contemporary social issues each claim to have scriptural authority for their opposing positions.

There is need for a study that would help congregations understand some of the many positions regarding biblical authority (or *power to influence*) and biblical interpretation (its *meaning*, originally and for today), and that would help congregations clarify their own positions on these issues. There is need for a study to help people know what dynamic is going on when they find themselves in discussions with Christians who come to scripture from other positions, and that would help them understand that the wide divergence of opinion on some of today's social issues is, in part, due to the way scripture is interpreted and applied.

"Biblical Authority and Interpretation: A Study for Congregations" addresses the above need for a congregational course of study on these issues. The project is designed as a series of eight lesson plans for a local congregation. A beginning lesson uses a questionnaire to determine where each class member stands in relationship to certain aspects of biblical authority and interpretation. The final class looks again at the questionnaire, noting its weaknesses and also noting any changes in individual positions

and/or understanding during the course. The final class will also look at a current social issue to see how different biblical approaches might deal with it.

The lessons between the first and last deal with six theologians, each lesson describing how a particular thinker approached scripture. The class will hear about the theologians' life and times and his (the theologians studied are all men) position regarding scripture. The class will prepare for each theologian by reading one of his sermons. The theologians used in this study are Pope Gregory I, Martin Luther, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Benjamin B. Warfield, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich. By no means do these six represent the total spectrum of approaches to scripture. Feminist theologians, liberation theologians, and the contemporary "Reader Response" approach to biblical interpretation are not included but certainly could be the bases for additional lessons. The theologians included do hold a variety of positions, however, and they are thinkers about whom most congregations have heard and expressed interest.

As lesson plans, the eight sessions are rather general. The bulk of the academic material on the theologians is in direct report form, with suggested tasks and questions for discussion provided. The teacher is encouraged to use as much or as little of the material as s/he sees fit and to present it in whatever manner is most effective for his/her class members. The sermons of the theologians are integral parts of the lessons, however, and should be used as part of the classes. The sermons, along with the questionnaire and other handouts, are in the Appendix; they may be copied for distribution to the class members.

It is my hope that participants in "Biblical Authority and Interpretation" will enjoy themselves and the six theologians, come to a better understanding of the complexity of the problems surrounding biblical authority and interpretation, and begin to clarify their own positions regarding these issues.

CHAPTER 1

Beginning Lesson

Notes to the Teacher

In this session you will be introducing the subject matter of the course, defining terms, and explaining how things will proceed. You will be using handout 1a (the Questionnaire Regarding Scripture) and handout 1b (the summary of the Presbyterian Panel Findings). You will also need pencils (for filling out the questionnaire), a good dictionary, and a chalk board or some newsprint for defining terms and for tabulating the results of the questionnaire.

Lesson Overview

Objective:

The participants will understand the general direction of the course, fill out a questionnaire that indicates their present attitude towards scripture, and compare their thinking with that of other Presbyterians.

Lesson Plan in Outline:

- A. Introduction and Statement of Purpose and Design.
- B. Prayer.
- C. Questionnaire (Handout 1a).
- D. Tabulation of Questionnaire Results and Comparison with Presbyterian Panel Findings (Handout 1b).
- E. Summary.
- F. Final Details and Prayer.

Lesson Content

Introduction, Statement of Purpose, and Design

Feel free to present the following in any way you like.

1. Throughout history Christians have asserted that the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God written and the only "rule of faith and life."¹ But, while agreeing on the importance of scripture, Christians have understood its *authority* differently and have *interpreted* its message differently. (You might ask for definitions of the two words *authority* and *interpretation*, or give someone a dictionary to look them up. Put up on newsprint simplified definitions of authority and interpretation: perhaps *influence* or *power to command obedience* for authority; and *explanation* or *determining meaning* for interpretation.)

The *authority* of scripture has to do with the importance given to the Bible in determining matters of Christian faith and life. Questions of *authority* are, "What sort of dominion, influence, or power to command, does the Bible have and how does it come by this power?" The *interpretation* of scripture has to do with understanding the original meaning of particular Biblical texts and relating that meaning to faith and life today. Questions of interpretation are, "What methods do we use to understand the original text and how might that original text speak to the situation of today?"

The terms *authority* and *interpretation* are closely related, but it is possible for different people to hold the Bible as supreme authority and yet differ greatly in interpreting what it says and how it speaks to today; conversely, it is possible for people to interpret scripture in the same way but differ as to whether or not they actually use scripture to inform the way they think and live. Christians hold different positions regarding the mission of the church, language about God, the role of women, and the ordination of gays and lesbians. Most of these Christians claim biblical authority for their positions, and they also claim that their positions are faithful interpretations of scripture. The issues of biblical

¹ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), The Book of Confessions (Louisville, Ky.: Office of the General Assembly, 1992), 3.19, 5.001-5.003, 6.002, 7.002-7.003, 9.27.

authority and interpretation have been important through Christian history and remain so today.

2. The purpose of this course is (a) to introduce class participants to six theologians who held different positions regarding the authority and interpretation of scripture, and (b) to help the class participants clarify their own positions on these important issues. While the course focuses upon biblical authority and interpretation, the class will also hear information about the six theologians' lives, times, and general thinking.

3. The basic design of the course is historical. We will consider Pope Gregory I (the Great) of the early Middle Ages, Martin Luther of the Reformation period, Friedrich Schleiermacher of the nineteenth century, and then three theologians who continue to influence the twentieth century: Benjamin B. Warfield, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich. The theologians were products of different times, they represent different approaches to scripture, and they come out of different traditions: Schleiermacher, Warfield, and Barth are of the Reformed tradition, while Luther and Tillich are Lutheran, and Gregory is Roman Catholic. (The teacher might put this information--theologians' names, dates, and traditions--on a sheet of paper to distribute to the class, so they will have an overview of the course.) Much of the material about the theologians will be given in lecture form, with time allowed for questions and discussion.

Homework will consist of sermons by the various theologians. Sometimes the sermon will illustrate the theologian's approach to scripture; other times it will not. But the sermons will give the class a taste of the theologian's general style. The sermons will be analyzed and discussed in class.

In addition to looking at the six theologians, the course will make use of a questionnaire based upon one sent out by the Presbyterian Panel of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

4. At this point, ask if there are questions, and if not, offer the following prayer or write one of your own.

Prayer

We are grateful, O God, that we can come together to grow in our understanding of the great gift you have given us in Holy Scripture. May we be open to new ideas, honest in all discussion, and respectful of the opinions of others. And may your Holy Spirit pervade what we think and do here, and thereby lead us on to new insights. In the name of the Christ we pray. Amen.

Questionnaire

Distribute pencils and handout 1a, the "Questionnaire Regarding Scripture." Tell the class that the questionnaire is based upon one created by the Presbyterian Panel, a research department of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).² The questionnaire was sent out in 1980 to a group of members-at-large, elders, pastors, and clergy in special ministries. The class will be filling out a questionnaire that is in a different format from the Presbyterian one, has reworded some questions, and has deleted two questions altogether. Encourage the class members to answer every question and then allow time for them to do so.

Tabulation of Questionnaire Results and Comparison with Presbyterian Panel Findings

1. Ask the class members who are willing, to share their answers to question 1, the question about the inspiration of scripture. Tell them that all of these positions are held by some members of the Presbyterian Church, so they are in good company wherever they find themselves. Place numbers 1 through 5 on newsprint and then get the people to call out where they stand. An alternate way is to mark five different pieces of newsprint and

² United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, "January, 1980, Questionnaire" (New York: Presbyterian Panel, 1980). The original questionnaire was done before the merger of the UPUSA with the PCUS, which formed the present Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

have them arranged along a wall; at the appropriate time tell people go and stand by the newsprint containing the number designating their position.

After everyone has been accounted for, try to establish percentages for each position, unless the group is so small that percentages would be a distortion. Also ask if anyone wrote in the space allowed (1b) to qualify his/her position. If so, let them say what they wrote and make a note of the qualification on a separate piece of newsprint. Then tell the group that, of the 2,990 persons responding to the questionnaire in 1980, 14 percent held position 1; 23 percent held position 2; 48 percent held position 3; 11 percent held position 4; and 4 percent held position 5.³ Write those percentages on the newsprint next to the position's number. Let the class spend some time making observations about the percentages.

If the class does not see it, you might point out that the middle position, though logically difficult, has more adherents than the two more conservative positions combined or the two more liberal positions combined. Looking at the conservative percentages against the liberal ones, one sees that the Presbyterian church in general tends to be more conservative; if it leans one way or the other, it leans to the divine side. How do your class members lean?

You might also tell the class that, while position 3 dominated in all categories of respondents (members-at-large, elders, pastors, and clergy in specialized ministry), the percentage for the most conservative position (position 1) was 17 percent for members-at-large; 18 percent for elders; 11 percent for pastors; and only 5 percent for clergy in specialized ministry. This demonstrates that Presbyterian pastors are generally more liberal than are their congregations and that clergy working outside the parish are more liberal still.

³ United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, "United Presbyterian Views on the Nature of Biblical Authority and the Use of Scripture" (New York: Presbyterian Panel, 1980), 1.

(This information and other results of the findings of the Presbyterian Panel in response to the questionnaire can be found in handout 1b. You might want to give this out now or wait until the end of class.)

2. After discussion of question 1, have the class members raise their hands if their positions on scripture have changed over the years. Compare your class results with the results on handout 1b.

3. Go through the rest of the questionnaire, comparing the individual class member responses with those in handout 1b. In some cases the Presbyterian Panel did not publish summary results. Make sure that the class deals with the material as long as it needs to.

3. If there seems to be time, ask the class to go back over the questionnaire to determine whether specific questions were related more to biblical authority or to biblical interpretation. Do some questions seem to deal with both? Do they see how related the two issues are?

Final Details and Prayer

Tell the class to keep their questionnaires and bring them to class each week. They will be referring to them occasionally throughout the study and will look closely at them again in the final session.

Give out the sermon by Pop Gregory I (handout 2a)⁴. Explain that our first theologian was a pope and lived at the very end of the sixth century. Stress the importance of reading Gregory's sermon out loud, and point out that there are questions to answer at the conclusion of the sermon.

Remind the class that all the theologians they will be studying lived before concern for inclusive language. Therefore all the theologians use the generic *man* to refer to

⁴ Pope Gregory I, "Homily 13," in Forty Gospel Homilies, trans. David Hurst (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 94-100.

humans, and all use the male pronoun when speaking of God. Their sermons naturally reflect that practice.

Conclude by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

CHAPTER 2

Lesson on Pope Gregory I

Notes to the Teacher

You have two options in this lesson. After you analyze Gregory's sermon, you may either look at portions of a second sermon or divide the class into groups of two and have them allegorize a portion of scripture as they think Gregory might have done it. In the latter case, you will need Bibles, pencils, and paper.

You will also be referring to questions 1, 4, and 10 of the questionnaire used last week. You might have abbreviated versions of the questions up on newsprint since they will be used with several of the theologians.

It would be helpful to create a Roman time line on butcher paper, based upon the information below. This would have the advantage of showing the class, rather than telling them, about the situation of Rome and Gregory's relationship to it.

Lesson Overview

Objective

The participants will be able to retell two facts about Gregory's life and point out the advantages and disadvantages of an allegorical approach to scripture.

Lesson Plan in Outline

- A. Opening Prayer.
- B. Initial Responses to Gregory's Sermon (Handout 2a).
- C. Overview of Gregory's Life and Method of Scriptural Interpretation.
- D. Analysis of Gregory's Gregory's Sermon.
- E. Analysis of Excerpt from "Homily 24" or Group Interpretation of Scripture Passage.
- F. Summary.
- G. Final Details and Prayer.

Lesson Content

Prayer

God of those who have gone before us, guide us as we study and learn from your faithful disciples in the past. Help us to appreciate their circumstances, respect their witness, and value their insights. May their example inspire us to meet our own challenges with the same dedication and steadfast commitment to you as did our ancestors in the faith.

And may your Holy Spirit be with us always. Amen.

Responses to Gregory's Sermon

Take five minutes to hear the class's initial responses to Gregory's "Homily 13." Listen without commenting too much upon their observations.

Material on Gregory's Life and Approach to Scripture.

Use as much of the following as you think appropriate for the class.

1. We are not certain of all the dates regarding Gregory's life. He was born around 550 C.E. to wealthy Roman parents during Rome's prolonged twilight years. The center of the empire had moved to Constantinople long before (in 330), and Rome and the western provinces had declined in importance, being governed by a series of inept leaders. German tribes from the north pushed into Italy. Rome fell to invading Visigoths in 410, was threatened by the Huns in 450, and was pillaged for two weeks by the Vandals in 455. By 493 the Ostrogoths had conquered Italy, their king giving outward allegiance to Constantinople and governing according to Roman practices. The Ostrogoths made Ravenna, not Rome, their capital.

In the middle of the sixth century the Emperor Justinian in Constantinople decided to recapture the western provinces and reunite the old empire. The campaign was long and, although successful for Constantinople, devastated Italy: "Five sieges and the destruction

of the aqueducts ruined Rome and reduced the population to a miserable few thousand."¹ Justinian made no attempt to restore Rome but left it to the church officials, concentrating his rebuilding on Ravenna, from where his representative proceeded to govern. The reunion project had no lasting value, and soon invading Lombards moved into the land already depleted by war.

This was the situation into which Gregory was born. He was well educated and served in his state's government, some suggesting that he even held the office of Prefect around 573.² In 574 he left public life to become a monk, donating much of his families' several estates to the church and to the poor. After spending only five years in monastic solitude, Gregory was appointed by the pope to serve as a Deacon and was sent to the Emperor in Constantinople to elicit help for Rome because of the Lombard threat. In 590 Gregory was elected Pope, just as an outburst of bubonic plague invaded Rome, severe drought threatened all crops, and the civil authorities in Ravenna proved useless against the invading Lombards.

Gregory did not want to be Pope; he preferred the simplicity and contemplation offered by monastic life. However, Gregory's education, his experience in civil service, and his knowledge of the courts at Constantinople had prepared him to lead the church (and indeed all of Rome and the surrounding area as well) during what proved to be a prolonged period of natural disaster and political upheaval. Gregory was able to negotiate a tenuous peace with the Lombards; he also marshaled the church's forces to tend those sick with plague, bury the dead, and distribute grain to the areas devastated by crop loss and

¹ Carlton J. H. Hayes, Marshall W. Baldwin, and Charles W. Cole, History of Europe, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1956), 89. All of the material about the decline of Rome is from this book, 66-116.

² This and most of the other biographical information comes from Gillian R. Evans, The Thought of Gregory the Great (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4-5.

threatened with starvation. Gregory's fourteen years of papacy were marked by practical attempts to solve overwhelming political and economic problems inherited because of the lack of competent civil government.

While working hard to deal with the external needs of his people, Gregory did not neglect their spiritual ones. Because of the terrible situations facing Rome, Gregory believed that the end of the world was near, and he wanted to make sure that his people were prepared spiritually for that awesome event; also because he believed the end was near, he wanted to convert as many outsiders as possible. He gave careful attention to his own spiritual growth, he was deeply concerned with teaching and preaching, and he sent missionary expeditions as far as southern England.

Gregory was ill and confined to bed from around 598 until his death in 604, but even in decline he continued to study scripture, oversee the practical affairs of his office, and write letters to advise and encourage bishops in surrounding areas.

2. Gregory did not know Greek or Hebrew. He did his study of scripture from the Old Translation (Latin) and from Jerome's Latin Vulgate. His method of interpretation was allegorical, the method he had inherited from numerous church fathers before him. In an allegorical approach to scripture, the surface or literal meaning is not discounted, but it is considered to be secondary to the deeper spiritual meaning that lies beneath the surface. As one scholar described the allegorical method, "the literal meaning [of a passage of scripture] is a husk containing and concealing the inner kernel of truth."³ Sometimes the symbolic meaning arises naturally from the historical person or event as, for example, the Exodus being used to symbolize freedom from sin. But often meanings are attributed without regard to the plain text. For example, Isaac's marriage to Rebekah might be interpreted as

³ G. W. H. Lampe, "The Exposition and Exegesis of Scripture to Gregory the Great," in The West from the Fathers to the Reformation, vol. 2 of The Cambridge History of the Bible, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 163.

symbolizing Christ's love for and marriage to the church, or perhaps Isaac might be interpreted as representing spiritual obedience which will always love and be wed to Rebekah's moral righteousness. In the medieval church allegory seems pushed to extremes, as when Gregory preached upon Jesus' encounter with the sinful woman at the home of Simon the Pharisee: he asserted that the ointment the woman poured on Jesus' feet represented "the aroma of a good reputation,"⁴ and the woman's hair, with which she dried Jesus' feet, represented "overflowing earthly possessions."⁵

For Gregory, not only persons and events held symbolic meaning. Rather, every detail in scripture carried a secret oracle of God which, if it could be deciphered, would reveal a doctrinal or moral truth. Frequently there were several levels of truth in a single passage, and even the most insignificant-seeming passage contained at least one message about Jesus Christ or the church or the ethical requirements of the faith. Gregory even found spiritual explanations for the numbers and proper names in Scripture. In his sermons, Gregory usually summarized the literal meaning of the text rather quickly and then proceeded to expand on the details which offered Christological or moral significance.

Lest we dismiss the allegorical approach as contrived, we must remember that Paul and the Evangelists interpreted the Old Testament as allegorical writings about Jesus Christ. Luke reported that "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). And allegory also proved invaluable as the earliest Christians took their message to the pagans. The idea that what was written down was only a physical "husk" containing an inner and quite spiritual "kernel" was compatible with Platonic and Gnostic thinking; inconsistencies in scripture could easily be dealt with through allegory; and some of the offensive doings of Old

⁴ Gregory, 272.

⁵ Gregory, 273.

Testament figures could be explained away through allegory--for example, Jerome explained that the young virgin sent to King David to "lie in his bosom" and "warm" him in his old age was actually a "figure of wisdom."⁶ All sort of warts and blemishes could be cosmetically covered over with allegory. Beryl Smalley asserts, however, that one must not

think of allegory as an artifice, imposed on Scripture by philosophers. . . . Rather was it a necessary condition of the spread of Christianity among the people. By no other means, at that time, could the taboos of primitive tribes, as described in the Law, have been spiritualized for the benefit of men who were hardly less primitive.⁷

Not all of the early church scholars were devoted to allegory. The interpreters in the Eastern church tended to respect the literal or historical sense of scripture and limit their figurative interpretation to passages designed for it--parables and poetic writings. But the Latin fathers found the literal approach too primitive; they preferred elaborate explanations and created those explanations to conform to orthodox theology.⁸ Augustine wrote that "Whatever does not seem to conduce to good morals and true faith is figurative. . . . If anything wicked is ascribed to God or to the righteous it is to be taken figuratively."⁹

As was said earlier, Gregory inherited the allegorical interpretation of scripture and, without much access to the eastern scholars, he did not question it. He was comfortable with the approach and, as others before him, found it useful to reconcile the apparent inconsistencies in scripture:

For Gregory, there can be no question of there being any contradiction in God's word, for there can be none in God himself. Yet contradictions and anomalies

⁶ Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), 21.

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ Ibid., 19-20.

⁹ Lampe, 179-80.

appear to present themselves: . . . Gregory explains that if the literal senses of two passages seem irreconcilable, the contradictions will vanish if the real meanings, the deeper sense, are understood by the reader who makes himself thoroughly familiar with the text.¹⁰

The other interpretive method used by Gregory is called "testimony"; testimony occurs when, as one is interpreting one text, another comes to mind that relates to it; the original text is then left for a time while the new text is interpreted.¹¹ This leads frequently to a wandering sermon, with one text being interrupted by another and sometimes by a third and forth. For example, in the sermon cited above about Jesus' encounter with the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, Gregory quoted the verse about the woman's sins being forgiven "because she has loved much," but then he moved into Song of Songs 1:7, the verse about the stag lying down at noon. Gregory preached that Jesus, who rested at the table of Simon the Pharisee, is the stag who rests away from the noon heat of unspiritual desire. Then he moved on to quote Mary in Luke 1:35, "the power of the Most High will overshadow you," the shadow seeming to mean repentance. Gregory did not stay with his original pericope but moved from one to another to document his point that "The repentant woman gave the Lord more nourishment interiorly than the Pharisee did exteriorly, since our Redeemer, like a young stag, had fled the heat of what is unspiritual to her heart, which the shadow of repentance had tempered after the fire of her vices."¹²

This method may seem arbitrary to us but it allows much freedom for the preacher.

Analysis of Gregory's Sermon

1. Point out that Gregory began his sermon with a brief summary of the literal sense of the passage (paragraph 1); he even gave a literal reason for the juxtaposition of the

¹⁰ Evans, 78.

¹¹ Smalley, 34.

¹² Gregory, 275.

inability of the disciples to understand with the healing of the blind man--that is, a physical miracle was needed to strengthen the faith of the uncomprehending disciples.

2. Then ask the participants to list the examples of allegory and/or testimony that they found in "Homily 13." If they miss the following, be sure to bring them out: the blind man became humanity (paragraph 2); the wayside along which he is sitting became Jesus the Way, the Truth and the Life (p. 4); and the man's begging became prayer to receive spiritual enlightenment (paragraph 4). Gregory gave the name Jericho a spiritual meaning (paragraph 3), and the people who restrained the beggar's cries became clamorous thoughts that disturb our prayer with images of the evil we have done (paragraph 5). In effect, Gregory took a miracle story and turned it into a parable about prayer, the distractions that prevent us from praying, and the importance of being persistent in prayer.

In addition, in paragraph 8 Gregory used the words about Jesus' "passing by" and his "standing still" to illustrate the church's doctrine of the incarnation and emphasize Jesus' full humanity (represented by movement, transience, and pity on the blind man) and full divinity (represented by standing fixed and immovable to give divine healing).

3. Gregory ended his sermon making use of the technique of testimony. The sentence "At once he saw and followed him" triggered for Gregory other passages about following Jesus and he used them all to exhort his congregation to follow Jesus by imitating him, even though it leads to suffering. Here Gregory skipped again, to the Lucan Beatitudes to follow up on his point that suffering leads ultimately to joy. He finished by moving back to the original passage, quoting the verse about the people seeing the healing and giving praise to God.

In interpreting the story of the blind beggar, Gregory did not stick to the actual account of the healing; rather he used the passage to give his listeners insight about prayer, remind them of the orthodox doctrine of Jesus' humanity and divinity, and exhort them to imitate Jesus in their daily living.

A Second Analysis or a Group Interpretation

At this point, you may do one of two things.

1. Give out handout 2b¹³ and let the class point out Gregory's use of allegory.

Remind the class that, of all the gospels, John is the one most given to symbolic interpretation. But, in the four paragraphs of handout 2, Gregory has pushed symbolism into allegory.

If the class does not see it, show them that in paragraph 3 Gregory says that the Lucan story of the catch of fish represents the present church, full of good and bad members, while the Johanne story represents the invisible church, full only of God's elect.

In paragraph 4 Simon Peter is the one who, though preaching, brings people out of the chaotic seas of this world onto the safe shores of eternal life.

The numerology of paragraphs 5 and 6 seem very extreme to us, but in using it, Gregory reminds the people of orthodox church doctrine and ethics: the 10 commandments and the gifts of the Spirit and the Trinity.

2. If you prefer, divide the group into twos and suggest that they try their hand at allegorical interpretation and at testimony too, if they can work it in. Use Luke 13:10-13 as the text. The couples may choose to interpret the passage as containing truths about Christ or the church or about moral virtue. After the group has had a chance to interpret, you may point out that Gregory dealt with this passage in one of his sermons,¹⁴ allegorizing the bent-over woman as sinful humanity which looks only at earthly things. He used testimony, bringing in explanations from Psalm 38:6 and Is 51:23 to explain the word *bent*, and even bringing in the Leviticus 21:17-20 prohibition against hunchbacks.

¹³ Gregory, excerpts from "Homily 24," 179-86.

¹⁴ Gregory, "Homily 31," 249-55.

Summary

1. Ask each person in the class to state two interesting things they learned about Pope Gregory.

2. Ask what are the advantages of an allegorical approach to scripture? If the class does not offer it, remind them of the Smalley quotation--"By no other means, at that time, could the taboos of primitive tribes, as described in the Law, have been spiritualized for the benefit of men who were hardly less primitive."¹⁵ Allegory invites one to look deeper into the text and to find significance in seemingly bizarre events.

What are some of the drawbacks of an allegorical approach? It allows scripture to say almost anything; who is to say who is right and who is wrong when it comes to biblical interpretation?

Would the class be comfortable if their pastor preached sermons using primarily an allegorical interpretation of scripture? Why or why not?

3. Does the use of testimony seem to be a valid way to deal with scripture? Why or why not?

4. How does the class think Gregory would respond to questions 1, 4, and 10 of the questionnaire they filled out last week? Would Gregory have added comments to any of those questions? Let the participants discuss as they choose.

The above questions are designed to allow the class to do some summarizing for themselves and to decide if an allegorical approach is one with which they themselves would be comfortable.

¹⁵ Smalley, 11.

Final Details and Prayer

Give out the sermon by Martin Luther (handout 3)¹⁶ to read during the week ahead. Consider having the study sermon preached in Sunday worship, so that they and the rest of the congregation can get a feel for how Luther might have sounded as opposed to how he seems when read.

Prayer: God of goodness and mercy, we thank you for your holy scriptures. They have spoken to different peoples in different ways at different times, but have pointed to your salvation always. We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit who enables people of dedication to study and bring messages of grace to your people. Keep us faithful in our study, that we too might bring messages of grace to others. Amen.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Raising of Lazarus, John 11:1-45," in Luther's Works, ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein, general ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 51:44-49.

CHAPTER 3

Lesson on Martin Luther

Notes to the Teacher

The prayers for today are two of Luther's own. You may copy and give them out for the class to pray in unison or pray them yourself, in the latter case perhaps changing the first person singulars to plurals.

A fifteen-minute video is suggested, if you can arrange for it.¹ Be sure that you view the video beforehand, and have the class set up so that everyone can see the video screen.

Lesson Overview

Objective

The participants will be able to tell what impressed them most about Luther's life. They will also be able to point out, by referring to his sermon, how Luther's approach to scripture's authority and interpretation rested upon the critereon of faith in the graciousness of God in Jesus Christ.

Lesson Plan in Outline

- A. Video.
- B. Prayer.
- C. Material on Luther's Life and Method of Scriptural Interpretation.
- D. Analysis of Luther's Sermon (Handout 3).
- E. Summary.
- F. Final Details and Prayer.

¹ "Martin Luther," Cloud of Witnesses, vol. 4 (Nashville, Tenn.: Graded Press, 1988), videocassette.

Lesson Content

Video

Show the videotape, "Martin Luther." Allow a short time for questions, but tell the class that additional material about Luther will be given later.

Opening Prayer

Be sure that the class knows that this is Luther's own prayer: "O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, thou shepherd and bishop of our souls, send thy Holy Spirit that he may work with me, yea, that he may work in me to will and to do through thy divine strength according to thy good pleasure. Amen."²

Material on Luther's Life and Approach to Scripture

Use the following material to supplement the video or in place of the video.

1. Martin Luther came on the scene at a very special time in history. The Renaissance had moved the focus of study from the other-worldly preoccupation of the middle ages to a concern for the earthly; geographical exploration was opening up new areas of investigation; the feudal system was breaking down; and the powerful Roman church had become rich, corrupt, and too involved with secular politics. In addition, nationalism was on the rise, and the invention of the printing press allowed information to move quickly. All of these things contributed to a positive climate for change, and without them Martin Luther might have remained an Augustinian monk and teacher. For example, without the Renaissance, Luther's studies might have been more limited. Without the corruption of the church, Luther might not have challenged it. Without the printing press, Luther's writings might not have reached many people. And without the breakdown of feudalism and the rise of nationalism, the lords and peasants might not have listened to

² Martin Luther, quoted in Fred W. Meuser, Luther the Preacher (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1983), 51.

Luther. The climate was right for change; and the man who entered that climate was brilliant, outspoken, and fired by a fresh understanding of the Christian gospel.

Luther was born on November 10, 1483, the second son of a small mining contractor.³ Luther's father was ambitious for young Martin and saved money that he might have an education and thereby better the whole family. Luther received a Bachelor of Arts in 1502 and a Master of Arts in 1505, both from the University of Erfurt. He intended to continue his studies in law but, returning to Erfurt after a visit to his family, was caught in a violent thunderstorm. When lightening struck near him, Luther prayed to St. Anne and vowed that he would become a monk if she would help him. Luther may have been thinking about monastic life for some time, for his father pressured him not to give up law and he could easily have withdrawn his sudden promise. Nonetheless, Luther entered Erfurt monastery of the Augustinian Hermits the same year he received his M.A. from the University. He was ordained a priest in 1507, studied theology, and was assigned to teach at the University of Wittenberg in 1508.

Luther followed with exactness the austere rules of the Augustinian order, but despite his dedication, he lived in constant fear of eternal damnation. He confessed his sins constantly and felt no relief; he did penance and found no comfort. Later he described his frame of mind in these words:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain

³ Most of the biographical material about Luther comes from Kurt Aland, Four Reformers (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1979).

by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath! " Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.⁴

It was only after arduous study of the book of Romans that Luther came to see that the righteousness God demands of us is the righteousness God himself gives to us, that we live by trusting that God has, in Jesus Christ, graciously given us the righteousness we could never earn through our own efforts. The doctrine of "justification by grace through faith" is such a familiar part of present-day Christian tradition that it may seem odd to us that Luther should have had such a difficult time understanding it. But the emphasis of the times was upon sin and penance, and Luther therefore found the idea that God would freely give us righteousness startlingly new, and he grabbed hold of it as though he had been born again. He dates this experience as being in the spring of 1518, though most scholars think that it occurred several years earlier.⁵

In 1917, even before his enlightenment experience if Luther's own chronology is correct, he was concerned enough about the church's selling of indulgences that he prepared "Ninety-Five Theses" against the practice. The selling of indulgences involved the merit held by various saints. According to the church, saints had more good deeds than they needed to enter heaven, and it was possible to buy some of their merit, thereby achieving remission of sin and redemption from the pain of purgatory. The money raised in this way went to finance church building projects and, in some cases, to purchase church positions for individuals. Luther's theses objected to the purpose of the indulgences, denied that the saints had "extra credit," denied that the pope had authority over purgatory, and asserted that indulgences created a false sense of complacency in people.⁶

⁴ Martin Luther, "Preface to the First Volume of Latin Writings," in The Protestant Reformation, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Harper & Row, Torchbooks, 1968), 2.

⁵ Aland, 24.

⁶ Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Penquin Books, 1977), 61-63.

Originally, Luther attacked what he saw as corrupt church practices, but the controversy soon grew as Luther began to write about larger theological issues--the authority of the pope in general, the meaning and number of the sacraments, and indeed the meaning of the gospel itself. For his opinions about all these issues, Luther looked to scripture to guide him; when he could not find support in scripture for the prevailing Roman positions, he spoke and wrote against those positions. Luther was excommunicated by the pope in 1521 and placed under imperial ban that same year because he refused to recant his writings. His words before the Emperor at the Diet of Worms are recorded as,

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason--I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other--my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.⁷

Some accounts of this episode include the now famous words, which have become Luther's trademark: "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise."⁸

In hiding for a year from religious and secular authorities, Luther continued to write, translating the New Testament into German and revising other work. He returned to Wittenberg in 1522 because of the excesses of some of the more radical reformers, and he continued to work there until his death in 1546. During that time he married Katherina von Bora, a former nun, and with her had a loving relationship and five children.

2. Associated with Luther and with the Protestant Reformation in general are the words, "grace alone, faith alone, and scripture alone."⁹ Those words imply that, before the Reformation, the church did not give an important place to grace and faith nor did it give first importance to the Bible. But that is not completely true. Throughout history the

⁷ Ibid., 144.

⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁹ See Hans J. Hillerbrand, introduction to The Protestant Reformation, xxii.

church has stressed God's grace and our response in faith, and throughout history the church has reverently believed the Bible to be the Word of God and therefore has studied it carefully. But customs did arise apart from the Bible, church doctrine was formed based upon Greek philosophy as well as upon the Bible, and the belief in God's gracious salvation was gradually modified to make a place for human good deeds. By the middle ages, systems and doctrinal emphases were in place which had not necessarily grown out of scripture but which scholars nonetheless spent time supporting with scripture, using the allegorical method passed on to them by the early church fathers, the method we saw used by Gregory the Great.¹⁰ Occasionally scholars pointed out that, with the allegorical method, any dogma could be found in any passage, but most accepted the method without question. Where disagreements arose concerning the meaning of any particular passage, the pope was the final authority. And so it was not that Martin Luther and the other reformers re-discovered and elevated the Bible, so much as that they began to read the Bible afresh and began to challenge church traditions and theology in light of their readings.

While Luther set down no precise exegetical methods, he did have a way of approaching the Bible. In the first place he agreed with the church that the Bible is the Word of God, not in the sense that it is spiritual wisdom hidden behind literal words, but in the sense that it is a record of God's saving acts on our behalf, particularly the saving act of giving the Christ to make us right with God.

You may ask, [Luther wrote in 1920] "What then is the word of God, and how shall it be used, since there are so many words of God?" I answer: The Apostle explains this in Romans 1. The word is the gospel of God concerning His Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through

¹⁰ Ralph W. Doermann, "Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation," in Interpreting Luther's Legacy, eds. Fred W. Meuser and Stanley D. Schneider (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1969), 16.

the Spirit who sanctifies. . . . [and] Faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the word of God, according to Romans 10.¹¹

In other words, Jesus Christ is the living Word (or saving act) of God, and the Bible is the Word of God as it witnesses in either testament to the good news of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ. And the right use of the Word of God is faith in its freely given goodness and its saving power. With these two beliefs as Luther's starting points--points based upon his remarkable experience about Romans--other things about the Bible followed.

In the first place, while Luther believed the whole Bible to be inspired by the Holy Spirit ("God is in every syllable"¹²), he also believed that some parts of it were more authoritative than others. The primary parts of the Bible are (1) those which most fully proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, God's living Word, and (2) those which proclaim faith in God's saving acts. Luther could therefore praise Genesis because it spoke of God's saving acts and Abraham's justification by faith; Luther could also speak against Esther, James, and Revelation, for Esther and Revelation had little gospel in them and James emphasized works. "Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching." and "If a thousand passages of Scripture are addressed in favor of justification by works. . . I have the author and Lord of Scripture."¹³

In addition, although Luther believed that all scripture was inspired, he acknowledged that there were inconsistencies and mistakes in it. He recognized that there were differences in the birth stories of Jesus, that the texts of the prophets were corrupt, and he

¹¹ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian Man," in The Protestant Reformation, 6.

¹² Luther, quoted in Roland H. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in The West from the Reformation to the Present Day, vol. 3 of The Cambridge History of the Bible, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 12.

¹³ Luther, cited in Doermann, 21.

admitted that Moses probably did not write the end of Deuteronomy nor did Solomon write Ecclesiastes.¹⁴ But because these details did not affect the heart of the gospel, Luther could dismiss them.

These are questions that I am not going to try to settle. Some people are so hairsplitting and meticulous that they want to have everything absolutely precise. But if we have the right understanding of Scripture and hold to the true article of our faith that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died and suffered for us, it won't matter much if we cannot answer all the questions put to us.¹⁵

Not only did the principles of gospel and faith guide Luther in matters of authority, but they also guided his interpretation of scripture. He let the important Romans' scripture be scripture's interpreter in most every instance. He did not completely do away with the allegorical approach that preceded him but he changed its direction; while the church usually used allegory to support church doctrine and ethics, Luther used allegory to point to Jesus Christ and God's saving grace. For example, the church had always interpreted the Matthew story of the wedding feast to be an allegory about Christ and the church; Luther went farther, explaining how the bridegroom is so perfect and the bride so marred and ugly that, in order for the marriage to take place, the bridegroom must take upon himself all the ugliness and corruption of the bride and dress her (though undeserving) in his light and life and righteousness.¹⁶ Luther also interpreted the wedding guest without the proper wedding garment to be one who slips into the church without true faith in the saving power of Christ but instead relies upon works.¹⁷

¹⁴ Doermann, 22.

¹⁵ Luther, as quoted in Bainton, "The Bible," 13.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, "Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity," in Sermons of Martin Luther, ed. John N. Lenker (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 5:233-34.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5:230.

While he continued to use allegory, Luther gradually gave more weight to the literal or plain text. He could see that Christ was in the plain text, and therefore there was no need for a pope to interpret the text through complicated allegories. Anyone reading with faith and guided by the Holy Spirit could understand scripture's central message. Because the Holy Spirit was in scripture itself, "if you cannot understand the dark passage, hold more firmly to the one that is clear."¹⁸ Scripture (as gospel) interprets scripture.

Luther was sometimes arbitrary in his decisions to accept the plain text or to read a passage figuratively. For example, he interpreted the second commandment figuratively, saying that the law against *making* images really meant that we are not to *worship* them. On the other hand, he took Jesus' words at the last supper, "This is my body" to mean exactly that, his actual physical body.¹⁹ But, while both of these texts are very important (the latter having to do with the sacraments), neither changes what Luther saw as central--the gospel of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, freely given to us and received through faith alone.

Even when Luther interpreted ethical passages from the Bible, he did so through the lens of God's love for us and our trusting response in love back to God. All good deeds are unimportant in themselves and cannot earn us God's love or make us right with God. God in Christ already loves us and has made us right with God, and all God wants in return is our faith and love. Even this we cannot give God on our own, according to Luther; our responsive faith and love are also gifts from God, but once we trust and love God, we act out our love in worship and in loving acts toward other human beings.

¹⁸ Luther, quoted in Doerman, 23-24.

¹⁹ Bainton, "The Bible," 29-30.

Analysis of Luther's Sermon (Handout 2)

Tell the class that this sermon was preached during the height of the indulgence controversy, some four and a half months after the posting of the Ninety-five Theses. As were many of Luther's sermons, it was copied down in Latin by Luther's students. This particular sermon was not published until 1702.

Use the following questions, based upon those on handout 3, to facilitate discussion.

1. Ask the class member how their own initial interpretations of John differed from Luther's and why they think this was? For example, some may have focused on Jesus' statement, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believe in me will never die." They may have seen this story as a foretaste of Jesus' own death and resurrection, a sort of reassurance that, despite the upcoming betrayal, trial, and crucifixion, Christ is always in control of life and death. Others may have seen the story in relationship to the prologue of John, with the main point being Christ's power to create new life, since what came into being through him originally was life. Others may have seen the different characters in the story as exhibiting various states of faith and misunderstanding, and Jesus' raising of Lazarus a gift to them despite their human confusion. This last would be closer to Luther's own interpretation, but probably few would have seen evidence of real sin as Luther did. The tone of the scripture passage does not suggest Jesus sees these people as so terribly sinful, but Luther had Augustine's allegory before him, and that probably influenced him to some degree.

2. Pursue the question about Luther's use of allegory as opposed to Gregory's. Be sure that they noticed that Gregory allegorized throughout this sermon, interpreting each detail of the biblical text to represent something else. Luther used allegory as a starting point but did not continue. Although in paragraph 11 he suggested that the characters in the text exhibit sinfulness and lack of faith, he did not create a one to one relationship as

allegories tend to do, nor did he force anything to represent a church doctrine or moral virtue. Luther took what the text said at face value.

3. Ask what the class found as they underlined phrases about God's love and human faith or hope? They should have noticed that Luther began his sermon with Augustine's allegory about sin and death, but he quickly moved to talk of God's love: Christ's love as quoted from the Lazarus story, then a quotation from Matthew to demonstrate how we are deeply loved (paragraph 6). He elaborated on Christ's love for us in paragraphs 7-9. In paragraph 11 Luther talked of Christ's love of the people, and in paragraph 15 he also talked about how "This Gospel therefore expresses nothing but the sweetness of Christ." In other words, although Luther began with an allegory about sin, his main point was to show how we are loved despite our sin. Because of Christ's love we can trust good to come to us. Luther interpreted this text in light of what he saw to be the good news of God's gift of grace and forgiveness to unworthy sinners.

4. Both Luther's sermon and Gregory's sermon are loving and pastoral. How do they differ in emphasis? (Luther emphasized God's love of sinners and our trust in that loving God, while Gregory's sermon nowhere mentioned God's love for the blind man; the latter sermon emphasized the necessity for persistent prayer, something we can do. Gregory quoted Jesus who says that the blind man's faith has saved him, but he did not follow that point up with words about the man's faith being in the Christ who has demonstrated God's gracious goodness to him in the healing; indeed Gregory's stress upon persistent prayer leads one to think that it was prayer, not faith, that brought about the healing.)

5. Both Gregory and Luther allegorized their stories so that sin is included, although nowhere in either story is there evidence of this. Ask the class member how the two theologians differ in their treatment of sin? (Gregory talked of a fearful judge and of

repentance and remorse, but he also talked of God's suffering for us; Luther talked of Christ's love for sinners and our hearts being changed because of that great love.)

6. Like Gregory, Luther did not stay with his text but brought in other scripture. Can his method be classified as *testimony*? (Remember, testimony usually interprets the secondary scriptures in themselves: Luther brought in secondary scripture mainly to bolster his position that God is gracious.)

7. Here are three extra questions for the group that do not relate to the handout questions:

A. We have learned that Luther believed that Jesus Christ is the true Word of God and that scripture is the Word of God as it witnesses to Jesus Christ or other saving works of God. Is there a place in the sermon where Luther actually states this? (paragraph 8)

B. One of the famous Lutheran quotations is "If our adversaries cite Scripture against Christ, I will cite Christ against Scripture."²⁰ Luther does this in paragraph 6; can the class describe how? (Luther rejects the passages from Psalms, not only by quoting Jesus' words from Matthew, but also by describing Christ's love for us in the next several paragraphs. Because God commanded Christ to love us, even though we are sinners, then the passages from Psalms about scorning the sinner are set aside.) Is the class comfortable with that sort of treatment? Why or why not?

C. What might be the problems in interpreting all scripture as Luther does, through the single lens of God's gracious act in Jesus Christ? (One might ignore biblical passages that have other things to say: James, for instance, does not emphasize grace and faith as Luther might like, but it certainly gives good warnings about becoming too complacent about faith, and it gives good advice about acting out one's faith.

²⁰ Bainton, "The Bible," 20-21.

Summary

Ask each person in the class to tell what impressed them most about Luther the man. Would they say that Luther is closer to people today who believe that everything in the Bible must be accepted exactly as written, or is he more liberal in his views? Where would Luther stand as regards question 1a of the "Questionnaire Regarding Scripture?" What would he be likely to add at 1b? How might he answer question 4? What would he add to question 10?

Ask the class to state Luther's understanding of what the Word of God is and how scripture relates to it. Ask if they agree with that position and the interpretative method that results from it. Do the class members think that Luther applied his method in the sermon of the raising of Lazarus? Why or why not? Do they agree with Luther's interpretation of the passage? Why or why not?

Ask the class if they are comfortable "quoting Christ against scripture?"

Final Details and Prayer

Give out the sermon by Friederich Schleiermacher (handout 4)²¹. Tell the class that we are skipping several centuries, moving with the Schleiermacher sermon into the early 1800s. Point out that this sermon is longer than the ones we have dealt with to date. Tell the group that it is important that they spend time with the Schleiermacher sermon and do the required work, because we will begin next week's class discussing the sermon even before we hear about the man who preached it.

Prayer:

Look, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled.
My Lord, fill it.
I am weak in the faith; strengthen me.

²¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, "The Effects of Scripture and the Immediate Effects of the Redeemer," in Servant of the Word: Selected Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher, trans. Dawn de Vries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 100-16.

I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent,
that my love may go out to my neighbor.
I do not have a strong and firm faith.
At times I doubt and am unable to trust you completely.
O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in you.
I have insured all my treasure in your name.
I am poor; you are rich and you did come to be merciful to the poor.
I am a sinner; you are upright.
With me there is an abundance of sin; with you a fullness of righteousness.
Therefore I will remain with you,
from whom I can receive but to whom I may not give. Amen.²²

²² Martin Luther, Luther's Prayers, ed. Herbert F. Brokering (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1967), 67.

CHAPTER 4

Lesson on Friedrich Schleiermacher

Note to the Teacher

Remember that in this session you will lead the class members through a discussion of Schleiermacher's sermon before giving them material about his life and thought. Do not worry if they are not able to answer all questions about the sermon; you will be coming back to it later.

Lesson Overview

Objective

The participants will be able to say why they think that Schleiermacher was called the "Father of Modern Theology." They will be able to describe Schleiermacher's method studying the language and composition of the text to arrive at an understanding of biblical texts. They will be able to describe, through discussion of a sermon, Schleiermacher's thinking about the relationship of scripture and the immediate presence of the Redeemer.

Lesson Plan in Outline

- A. Opening Prayer.
- B. Analysis of Sermon (Handout 4)
- C. Material on Schleiermacher's Life and Method of Scripture Interpretation.
- D. A Look Back at the Sermon for the Day.
- E. Summary
- F. Final Details and Prayer.

Lesson Content

Prayer

Open our minds, O God, that we may hear your Word spoken in our discussion today; open our hearts, O God, that we may experience the Redeemer among us today. Amen.

Analysis of Sermon

1. Begin with the question on handout 5: "Do you relate more to those who experience Christ through scripture or have you had direct and immediate experiences of Christ's presence? Have you experienced Christ in both ways?" Let the class members share their responses for a short while.

2. Ask the participants if they noticed how Schleiermacher's talk about the Jesus Christ differed from Luther's. If they have trouble, point out that Luther spoke of *Jesus Christ* or of the *Son of God*, while Schleiermacher usually uses the title *Redeemer*. In addition, Luther emphasized trust in God's gracious saving act through Christ--faith in something done "out there" (so to speak) by God--while Schleiermacher is more interested in a direct personal experience of the Redeemer himself--a feeling inside (paragraphs 5 and 6, 10 and 11, among others).

Of course, Luther's beliefs were not simple intellectual assent; they involved feelings as well: joy at the knowledge that one is now made right with God, joy in the face of God's wonderful goodness, joy in the freedom that one no longer needs to work to earn God's favor. Schleiermacher's feeling, on the other hand, is an experience of the very presence of the Redeemer; that feeling might include joy or comfort or relief, but it is the experience of personal relationship itself that is of primary importance.

Allow the group to talk a bit about the above. Do they relate more to Luther's or to Schleiermacher's position? Are there denominations today that seem to emphasize the one more than the other?

3. In this sermon Schleiermacher stresses the importance of a personal relationship with Christ, but he does not see Christianity in purely individualistic terms. Rather, he says that the experience of Christ in the individual should benefit the whole Christian community. Where do you see evidence of these thoughts? (paragraphs 21 and following) How does this differ from some of the thinking today--that "Jesus and me is the important

thing" or that "I worship best out of doors, in the midst of nature," or that "I do not need to go to church to be Christian"?

4. Ask the members of the class if they found places where Schleiermacher tried to make the text relevant to his congregation? (Paragraph 4 talks of the important place of reading and explaining scripture in the church today and mentions the powerful responses to scripture that most individuals have today; paragraphs 6 through 8 talk about the controversy in the present church between people who hold to "scripture alone" and those who claim to have had experience of the "immediate effects" of the Redeemer; paragraph 13 brings in the experience all have had of feeling the effects of distant loved ones; paragraph 17 has the words "often enough in our own church we have . . ."; paragraph 21 and following talks about how individual members today are to use the gifts given them.)

5. Turning now to the parts of the sermon that deal with scripture, ask the class about their responses to the questions about Thomas Muntzer and Martin Luther. Although Schleiermacher nowhere says that his experience of the "immediate effects of the Redeemer" is an experience of the Holy Spirit, does the class equate the two? Or does the class perhaps understand that the Holy Spirit is in both the presence of the Redeemer in scripture and in the experiences of immediate and personal effect? Does this help explain the person of the Holy Spirit for them? Where do they see Schleiermacher in relation to the Muntzer/Luther debate?

6. What word did Schleiermacher use for scripture? (Treasure.) Ask the class if they were able to find passages in this sermon that seemed to give Schleiermacher's attitude towards scripture. If they have trouble, ask them to look at paragraph 4 ("every . . . encounter with scripture was like a new, joyous, and powerful appearance of the Lord himself."); paragraph 12 ("The original spiritual efficacy of [Christ's] existence is, of course, mediated only through the Word;"); paragraph 17 ("immediate recognition that this is the Lord"); and paragraph 19 ("God's Word must ever remain the standard for

measuring and judging everything else"). Schleiermacher holds scripture in high regard, but does he seem to think that it is important because it reveals church doctrine, rules, and eternal truths, or is it important because it can mediate the experience of the Redeemer?

7. In light of this sermon, does the class think that Schleiermacher would probably give more importance and authority to the Old or the New Testaments? Have the participants check paragraph 3, where Schleiermacher answers this question himself. Tell the class that, while Luther expressed a special fondness for the Old Testament, Schleiermacher preached most frequently on the New Testament.

8. Go through these next few questions quickly; they have to do with Schleiermacher's literary approach to scripture, and we will come back to them after hearing the material about Schleiermacher's life and thought.

--Did Schleiermacher allegorize anything in his sermon?

--Did Schleiermacher clarify any specific language for his congregation? Be sure that the class noticed paragraph 3, in which Schleiermacher clarified the word *scripture*. In paragraph 4 he clarified the meaning of *opening*, that it is not merely *reading* but also *interpreting*.)

--Did Schleiermacher interpret the parts of this text in light of the whole, and did he also interpret the whole in light of the parts? (Schleiermacher looked at the verses about the effects of scripture and heart burning and at the verse about the effects of Jesus' presence in light of each other and then related them both to the final part about sharing what they had received with the other disciples. He also looked at and interpreted his specific text in light of its total context.)

Material about Schleiermacher's Life and Method of Scripture Interpretation.

1. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was born into an entirely different atmosphere than was Martin Luther. Luther was part of the beginnings of the Renaissance, and his battles were fought against the powerful Roman Catholic church. By

Schleiermacher's time Renaissance thinking had been augmented by advances in science, and the church was not only split into many denominations but had lost much of its power and influence over people of culture and intellect. What had happened to change the times so greatly?

In the first place, the split between Catholics and Protestants had not really settled things, for Protestants proceeded to war amongst themselves.¹ In the seventeenth century they argued about double predestination, human free will, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the perseverance of the saints. The Bible was elevated to an inerrant position, but because it had been translated into almost all European languages, anyone and everyone could read it and form opinions about the major Christian beliefs. Wars were fought over doctrinal issues, based upon various readings of the Bible.

Some groups grew tired of the debates over orthodoxy and withdrew into communities where they emphasized prayer, personal conversion, and following Jesus Christ. This was the pietistic approach of Quakers, the Moravians, and some Puritan groups.

Still other grew took a more rational approach.² Scientific discovery had proved that creation operated according to reasonable cause and effect laws. Therefore it was reasonable for people to believe that God was reasonable and had created a reasonable world. It was also reasonable to believe that God had created a cause and effect moral law inside everyone so that society would be orderly. It was not reasonable to believe that a God who created reasonable laws would interrupt those laws with special miracles. It was

¹ This information and much of what follows was taken from Norman Sykes, "The Religion of the Protestants," in The West from the Reformation to the Present Day, vol. 3 of The Cambridge History of the Bible, 175-98.

² This paragraph draws on Sykes above and also upon W. Neil, "The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible, 1700-1950," in The West from the Reformation to the Present Day, vol. 3 of The Cambridge History of the Bible, 238-93.

not reasonable to believe that a God who had been revealed in the laws of nature, available to all the world, would give a special revelation in the Bible, which was difficult to understand and limited to only a few. It was not reasonable for Christians to be fighting amongst themselves about doctrines that did not seem compatible with reason anyway. John Locke tried to make Christianity "reasonable" by watering it down and taking out the unreasonable parts. Others were drawn to belief, not in the Christian God, but in one who merely created the world, set it into motion with all its reasonable cause and effect laws, and then simply sat back and watched.

By the time the nineteenth century arrived, the choices were not particularly appealing. One could choose those traditions which clung stubbornly to orthodoxy but seemed to have lost the graciousness of the gospel. One could choose to withdraw into a pietistic community where one could live out one's faith in love, but ignore the best thinking of the times. One could simply give up on religion altogether or choose a watered-down Christianity which was rational but without a God who could do much for you.

There was another movement influencing the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Some of the more educated people, both in England and in Europe, began to embrace the unconventional as opposed to the reasonable, to stress human freedom and individuality rather than societal morality, and to understand God as in all of nature rather than above and apart from nature. These people exalted the workings of the human spirit and advocated "a journey into the inner feelings and passions which constituted the soul and which were to be regarded, ultimately, as a microcosm of the infinite life with which they were in continuity."³ This approach to life was called the Romantic movement, and

³ Keith Clements, introduction to Friedrich Schleiermacher (London: Collins Liturgical, 1987), 13.

its preoccupation with feelings and human individuality began to color much of the art and poetry of the time.

The above gives some idea of how things moved from the milieu of Luther's days to that of Schleiermacher. In many ways the multitude of positions that characterized the early nineteenth century--the insistence upon reason by many, the resolute holding to orthodoxy by others, the complete rejection of religion by still others, and the yearning for something passionate and important in the midst of it all--also characterizes our own milieu.

2. Friedrich Schleiermacher, often called "the father of modern theology,"⁴ was influenced by and, more importantly, responded creatively to most of the pervading thinking of his time. Born in what is now Poland near the end of the 18th century, his theological heritage was Reformed orthodoxy but his upbringing was in a pietistic Moravian school. The Enlightenment rationality of his day caused him to question many of the doctrines of Christianity, while the Romantic emphasis upon inner experience and its belief that the divine could be apprehended in the particular reinforced his pietistic respect for feelings and his personal devotion to Christ.

In 1799, right at the turn of the century, Schleiermacher published On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers. In that collection of essays Schleiermacher put forth a new thesis to all those who had given up on, or saw no power in, the Christian faith. He used the rationality of the Enlightenment and appealed to the feelings of the Romantics by proposing that religion was not a set of doctrinal truths to be believed, nor yet a miraculous and irrational revelation of God to be accepted on faith, nor yet a system of morality to be followed. Rather, "True religion," wrote Schleiermacher, "is a sense and taste for the Infinite."⁵ It is "the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things,

⁴ Dawn de Vries, introduction to Servant of the Word, 12.

⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, Torchbooks, 1958), 39.

in and through the Infinite, and of all temporal things in and through the Eternal."⁶ In other words, Schleiermacher maintained that religion is the awareness that comes to us at certain times that everything in the world participates in and is dependent upon something larger and beyond itself. Religion involves reason but realizes that reason participates in an eternal reason beyond itself. Religion also involves beauty and goodness but is aware that beauty and goodness are connected to infinite beauty and goodness. In order to reach the people of his day, Schleiermacher did not begin with doctrine or revelation or the Bible; he appealed to a feeling which, he maintained, was basic to humanity itself.

Although in On Religion Schleiermacher wrote mainly about religion in general, he was nonetheless a Christian, and the person and work of Jesus Christ were central for him. He maintained that, while all people may have within themselves an awareness of their relationship to the Infinite, Jesus Christ is the one human whose "God-consciousness" or awareness of dependency upon God was perfect and continuous. Rather than talk in orthodox terms about the divine and human essence in Jesus, Schleiermacher wrote that, "The Redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of his God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in him."⁷ Jesus was always, at every minute, aware of his relationship to God and open to God's activity; because of that, God existed in him fully and determined all that he did.

Schleiermacher usually referred to the Christ as "Redeemer" because he believed that Christ's major work was to redeem humanity which meant, for him, moving humanity

⁶ Schleiermacher, On Religion, 36.

⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928), 387. As quoted in Clements, Friedrich Schleiermacher, 55-56.

from God-forgetfulness to God-consciousness. We are not redeemed by the sacrificial act of Jesus on the cross, which made things right with God; rather, we are redeemed as we encounter Jesus himself and touch his perfect God-consciousness. As we connect to the Redeemer, we receive some of his awareness of God and are transformed and made more aware of our total dependency upon God.

3. Schleiermacher's full name was Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher. He was precocious, began to read at age four, and taught himself French and Latin.⁸ He was educated at the University of Halle and in Berlin, and he served as pastor to several Reformed churches and as chaplain to Berlin's principal hospital, the Charite. In 1802 he became a professor at the University of Halle but returned to Berlin in 1807 to become minister of Trinity Church and later to help in the beginnings of the new University of Berlin. He was appointed chair of that university's theology department and became Rector of the University in 1815. He wrote, taught, preached and was occasionally involved in Prussian politics until his death in 1834.

Physically, Schleiermacher was a small man, slightly deformed, but he was nonetheless a very social man who loved good company and was always in demand in cultured circles. He married rather late, in 1809 at the age of forty-one, to a young widow with two small children. Together they had three more children and adopted two others.⁹ When Schleiermacher died of pneumonia, the mourning in Berlin was far more extensive than it would have been had he been simply an academic theologian; his compassionate character and his steady and influential preaching in Berlin, as well as his contributions of

⁸ Most of the biographical material on Schleiermacher came from Clemmets' introduction, 15-34.

⁹ This information is deducted from various parts of W. Robertson Nicoll, "Biographical Sketch," in Selected Sermons of Schleiermacher, trans. Mary F. Wilson (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1890), 1-37.

writing and teaching, brought thousands of people out in February to pay tribute as his funeral procession moved through the streets.

4. The main focus of this study is Schleiermacher's thinking about and interpretation of Holy Scripture. The Bible was very important to Schleiermacher. At the grave of his nine-year-old son he said that his wish had been always "to be nothing but a servant of this divine Word."¹⁰ He lectured extensively on the interpretation of scripture, and his approach seems quite contemporary. Before beginning to interpret an ancient text, Schleiermacher took for granted that one would learn something of the historical situation: "That task [of gathering historical data] should be done even before interpretation begins, since it is the means for re-creating the relationship between the speaker and the original audience, and interpretation cannot begin until that relationship has been established."¹¹

But after gathering historical information, Schleiermacher argued that the work of interpreting the Bible is much like interpreting any piece of spoken or written communication. In both cases full understanding can only be achieved if one (1) is thoroughly acquainted with language and how it functions and (2) thoroughly acquainted with the writer or speaker. "The success of the art of interpretation depends on one's linguistic competence and on one's ability to know people," said Schleiermacher.¹²

By "linguistic competence" Schleiermacher meant not only knowledge of the language in itself but also knowledge about how language typically functions and therefore how a different sort of usage might be significant. By "the ability to know people" Schleiermacher did not mean psychological intuition. He meant the ability to figure out the

¹⁰ Schleiermacher, "Sermon at Nathanael's Grave," in Servant of the Word, 211.

¹¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts, ed. Heinz Kimmerle, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977). As quoted in Clements, 163.

¹² Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics, as quoted in Clements, 48.

intentions of the person writing or speaking by examining the arrangement of his/her ideas: "One's ability to know people refers especially to a *knowledge of the subjective element determining the composition of thoughts*."¹³ Schleiermacher admits that complete linguistic competence and complete knowledge of people is impossible but, by examining both those aspects of a given communication and moving back and forth between the two, understanding begins to emerge. For example, in a contemporary conversation, if I hear someone say "Sarah will receive her reward," I must be familiar with various possible meanings of the sentence: possibly Sarah turned in a bank robber and therefore will receive a good reward, or possibly Sarah has done something bad and will receive her just desserts. And, even if I do not know the speaker, I must also interpret the speaker's intent. I do this by listening carefully to see if s/he sounds joyful, or sarcastic, or angry. I must also pay attention to what the speaker said before and after the particular statement about Sarah, and begin to interpret the specific sentence in light of the other information. Understanding the sentence about Sarah can only be achieved as one moves back and forth between knowing the language and interpreting the intent of the speaker as s/he puts the communication together.

The gospel of John is an ancient text in a different language, but Schleiermacher maintained that the task of interpretation is similar. For example, one finds in John 3:14-15 the sentence, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." In order to understand the sentence, one must not only know the meaning of each word but also be familiar with the Numbers story of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness and with the figure *Son of Man*. But more is needed; we must know what John meant when he used these words and references. One cannot, of course, hope to grasp John's meaning through hearing his tone

¹³ Ibid., 161. Italics mine.

of voice as he quoted Jesus' words but, by looking at the composition of the text in its context (the next sentence talks about God loving the world and giving the only Son), and by looking at John's use of the words "lifted up" and "eternal life" in other portions of his gospel, one begins to understand that Jesus' being lifted up upon the cross (an ugly sight and a judgment upon humanity) somehow brings eternal life to undeserving people just as Moses' lifting up the bronze serpent (also an ugly sight and a symbol of judgment upon the complaining Israelites) brought physical life and healing to undeserving people. One cannot simply know the language and speculate about the writer's possible personality and therefore meaning. One must deduce meaning from the text itself. "Only from a person's writings can one learn his vocabulary, and so, too, his character and his circumstances."¹⁴ Therefore understanding any particular text involves examining it in itself, comparing its use of language with general use and with the author's particular use in other passages, and looking at the way the writer has arranged the material.

This leads to Schleiermacher's insistence that the parts of an ancient text (or of a contemporary communication) must be understood in light of the whole and the whole message must be understood in light of its parts. One cannot take a sentence or paragraph away from its context and hope to understand it. The writer (or contemporary speaker) arranges the parts to relate to each other, to build on one another, and together to give a total meaning. This is why one must read a text several times, first reading to get a general meaning or theme, then reading to see if that general theme helps to interpret the parts and/or if understanding the parts changes or redefines the general theme. Interpretation is therefore circular and seldom ever completed.¹⁵

¹⁴ Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics, as quoted in Clements, 167.

¹⁵ Ibid., 169-70.

This approach to scripture is not accomplished easily. But then, Schleiermacher did not think interpretation to be an easy task: "The art of interpretation. . . is based on the assumption that misunderstanding occurs as a matter of course, and so understanding must be willed and sought at every point."¹⁶ And there are some texts that may forever remain a mystery.¹⁷ And yet Schleiermacher reasoned that by moving back and forth between examining language and examining a writer/speaker's particular use of it, by moving back and forth between looking at the whole composition and then examining its parts in relationship to each other and the whole, some understanding could take place. It was his hope that through diligent application of the above principles one could "understand the text at first as well as and then even better than its author."¹⁸

Schleiermacher's approach to scripture is a literary one that might be applied to any piece of communication. Schleiermacher did not try to refute a belief in divine inspiration, but he maintained that, "even if the authors had been merely passive tools of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit could have spoken through them only as they themselves would have spoken."¹⁹ And our interpretation of what they spoke or wrote therefore still involves an analysis of language and an understanding of the speaker/writer's special way of composing.

Schleiermacher objected to the sort of allegorical interpretation that Gregory used, in which one might find all sorts of arbitrary meanings in any given text. He understood that some texts were to be taken metaphorically (parables and poetry) and other texts made allusions that involve a second meaning or brought to mind a thought beyond the literal

¹⁶ Ibid., 166.

¹⁷ Ibid., 171.

¹⁸ Ibid., 167.

¹⁹ Ibid., 164.

text,²⁰ but these legitimate figurative meanings usually made themselves evident to all. They should never be forced upon a text.

Schleiermacher's writings about interpreting scripture are themselves difficult to interpret. Nonetheless, one can see evidence of his method at work in his sermons. Go back to the sermon the class has studied and see if the participants can recognize, behind the constructed sermon, Schleiermacher's careful analysis of this scripture text's parts to its whole, and its general to particular language.

A Look Back at the Sermon for the Day

1. Ask the class to concentrate on how Schleiermacher seemed to interpret his text. Schleiermacher wrote that, "The success of the art of interpretation depends on one's linguistic competence and on one's ability to know people."²¹ While we cannot watch Schleiermacher go through the process of examining the language and figuring out how Luke used it, we have already noted how he clarified Luke's use of the words *scripture* and *open* (paragraphs 3 and 4). The explanation of *scripture* is obvious, but notice how Schleiermacher uses Luke himself to define the word *open*. He points out that Luke could not have meant by *open* that Jesus merely recited passages to the disciples, "repeating what they could have read for themselves" (paragraph 4). Rather Luke intended *open* to mean "to initiate them into the connections that had remained hidden from them." Schleiermacher can say this because Luke himself said, earlier in verse 27, that Jesus "interpreted" the things about himself, and because Luke in this specific text has the disciple say that their hearts burned within them as Jesus talked to them and was opening the scriptures to them. This may seem a slight example, but it goes to the heart of Schleiermacher's method. He

²⁰ Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics, as quoted in Clements, 163-64.

²¹ Ibid., 48.

does not allegorize nor does he put his own meaning into the text; instead he tries to determine meaning by examining the text itself to learn the writer's own intention.

2. Schleiermacher's sermon does not stay centered upon the text. But neither does he violate the text. Although his text is only four verses, Schleiermacher makes us aware of the larger story from which they come, and he does not deal with any particular verse without reference to its context. In paragraph 16 Schleiermacher suggests that the writer could have left out either the account of the opening of scripture or the recognition at table; because the writer included both episodes, we are justified in assuming that "both the effect of the Word and the immediate, spiritual presence of the Lord should always be united with each other in the Christian church." In other words, Schleiermacher used the arrangement of the material to determine the whole meaning of the passage.

In addition, although not a part of the preaching text, Schleiermacher does not overlook what comes afterward but goes on to talk about the disciples returning to share their experience with the others in Jerusalem. He understands the totality of the story to involve the intertwining of scripture, an experience of the Redeemer, and a sharing with the larger community. Schleiermacher interprets the parts of the text in relationship to the theme as he sees it, uses the parts to interpret the theme, and from that interpretation creates his sermon.

3. Schleiermacher wrote that, "even if the authors had been merely passive tools of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit could have spoken through them only as they themselves would have spoken."²² In this sermon, do you get the feeling that Schleiermacher thinks scripture is divinely inspired or simply the words of ordinary humans? How might Schleiermacher have responded to question 1a of our "Questionnaire Regarding Scripture"? What would he have added to question 10?

²² Ibid., 164.

4. While Schleiermacher's method of interpreting scripture was not widely embraced in his time, many preachers today use a similar approach to scripture--trying to look at texts in context and in relationship to other texts by the same writer. Ask the class if they think that Schleiermacher's method seems too analytical? Why or why not? Do they agree that scripture can be approached like other communication? Is Schleiermacher's method a corrective for those who proof-text their ideas and quote scripture verses without reference to contexts?

What might be some of the dangers of Schleiermacher's method? (One might forget one is dealing with holy writings altogether. One might tend to rely on one's own analysis and neglect any guidance by the Holy Spirit; certainly the sermon we are dealing with gives no indication that Schleiermacher neglected the experiential side of things, but it might be possible for others to do so. In addition, one might misinterpret Schleiermacher's words about the importance of "knowing people" to mean a psychological intuition about the people in the text rather than an examination of the composition of the text; that could lead to all sorts of speculation. Actually, preachers today do that when they take a particular character and create a first-person monologue about how s/he feels and thinks when there is little in scripture upon which to base such a monologue. That might be fine on occasion, but too much creativity along the lines of psychological speculation are just as dangerous as far-fetched allegory.)

5. Some of Schleiermacher's general ideas can be found in this sermon. He does not speak of specific Christian doctrines nor does he even use his own theological terms--"God consciousness," for example; but he does speak about Christian religious experience, mediated sometimes through scripture and at other times in a direct encounter with the Redeemer. He does not say much about the Holy Spirit but the experiences he describes could easily be included in a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He does not talk about the nature of the church as such, but he does describe what we Christians are to be about, as

individuals and as a community of faith. Although probably speaking to believers, Schleiermacher still makes an effort to speak in fresh ways about old truths, thus appealing to any "cultured despisers" who might happen to be in the congregation.

Summary

1. During this final part of the session remind the class that Schleiermacher has been called "the father of modern theology." Although they have had only an introduction to his thinking, perhaps they have ideas as to why Schleiermacher received this description. The class might mention that Schleiermacher re-formulated Christianity to appeal to his times. He emphasized the element of feeling or personal experience which has been a mark of Christianity ever since. His approach to interpreting scripture was new and rational. Which of these innovations seem to be most significant?

2. To date, we have seen a theologian who allegorized scripture to support doctrine and ethics, one who interpreted most all of scripture through the single lens of God's grace in Jesus Christ and our response in faith, and one who applied to scripture the same techniques used to interpret secular communication. Which approach seems to you to be most difficult? Which approach seems to provide the clearest understanding of what scripture has to say? Is it possible to combine any of these approaches?

Ask if there are further comments or questions.

Final Details and Closing Prayer

Hand out the sermon by Benjamin B. Warfield (handout 5)²³. Point out that Warfield was an American theologian, born seventeen years after Schleiermacher's death.

Prayer: As we go our separate ways, O Loving God, may our Redeemer accompany us--giving us gifts that will enrich us, giving us an appreciation for the gifts of others,

²³ Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Prodigal Son," in Biblical and Theological Studies, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1952), 523-42.

giving us a willingness to share our various gifts for the benefit of all, and giving us joy in your presence always. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Lesson on Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield

Notes to the Teacher

Today you will be using a blackboard or newsprint and a marker to list the responses to task 2 of the handout. You will also be using the "Questionnaire Regarding Scripture" (handout 1a).

Lesson Overview

Objective

The class will be able to identify some of the problems facing orthodoxy in the nineteenth century and describe Warfield's response. They will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the doctrine of Plenary Inspiration. They will also be able to understand the difference between inerrancy and literalism.

Lesson Plan in Outline

- A. Opening Prayer.
- B. Blackboard Work.
- C. Material on Warfield and his Position on Scripture.
- D. Analysis of Sermon, "The Prodigal Son" (Handout 5).
- E. Summary
- F. Final Details and Prayer.

Lesson Content

Prayer

Write your own or have sentence prayers of thanksgiving offered by the group.

Chalk Board Work

Ask the class to tell what they found as they did task 2 following Warfield's sermon. Put the words (*teach, teaching, lesson, point, etc.*) in one list, the doctrines with the paragraphs in which they are mentioned, in another list.

Material on Warfield

1. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield was born on November 5, 1851, at "Grasmere" near Lexington, Kentucky. His father was a prosperous farmer and his mother the daughter of a well-known Presbyterian pastor, founder of a seminary at Danville, Kentucky.¹ There have been no biographies of Warfield and, because "he was ever reticent with regard to personal matters,"² we know little of his early life. We do know that his initial interests were scientific and that he read Darwin enthusiastically. In 1871, at the age of nineteen, he graduated from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), having received the highest honors of his class. He entered Princeton Seminary in 1873, graduated in 1876, and married Annie Pearce Kinkead the same year. The newly-married couple went to back to Europe, where Warfield studied in Leipsic. In 1878 he became an instructor of New Testament Languages and Literature at Western Theologian Seminary in Pittsburgh. The following year he was appointed professor and also ordained to the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. He remained at Western for nine years. In 1887 he was called to the chair of Didactic and Polemical Theology at Princeton Seminary.

Warfield was first and foremost a scholar. The "reticence," mentioned above, held throughout his life. Unlike the theologians we have studied so far, Warfield did not take a public part in the workings of the church, nor did he preach or speak frequently outside the academic community. His students spoke glowingly of his abilities as a teacher: "Dr. Warfield was the best teacher I ever had either in America or Germany. I took notes under him assiduously; and the notes I took I have used more than those of all other professors

¹ Most of the Warfield biographical information is from Samuel G. Craig, "Benjamin B. Warfield," in Biblical and Theological Studies, by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1952), xi-xlvi.

² Craig, xiii.

together. He taught us with rare clarity and persuasiveness."³ Again, "Personally, Dr. Warfield has had a greater influence in my life and ministry than any other man I have ever met. . . .his figure and influence still stand before me as I prepare sermons; while the recollection of his personal piety helps me to live a more Christ-like life."⁴ Apart from these personal tributes, we know the man mainly through his writings, which were many and wide-ranging.

2. Warfield lived in a time when, as one historian puts it, there was "wholesale intellectual defalcation from evangelical Protestantism."⁵ From its beginnings America had been orthodox Calvinist with intense pietistic leanings. The nineteenth century was a low point for American orthodoxy, however: morality had loosened; free-thinking societies blossomed, holding meetings on Sunday; Unitarianism had been introduced; and discoveries in science called into question the Biblical account of creation. More importantly, scholars (mainly German) had begun to apply scientific historical methods to the study of the Bible.

How did this scientific approach to the Bible manifest itself? At first there were simple and careful observations. For example, Genesis has two creation stories, one poetic and liturgical, the other narrative; also in Genesis the same story seems sometimes to repeat itself and there are differing names for God; all these things suggest that there were several different strands of material recorded by different people, combined into a single document at a latter date. Or again, Mark seems to be the basis of much of Luke and Matthew, but

³ Dr. George L. Robinson, as quoted in John E. Meeter, forward to Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1973), 2:ix.

⁴ Rev. F. T. McGill, quoted in Meeter, 2:viii-ix.

⁵ Mark A. Noll, "The Princeton Theology," in Reformed Theology in America, ed. David Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985), 16.

Luke and Matthew also contain material not found in Mark but similar to each other; does this suggest a special source to which Luke and Matthew both had access? The letter to the Colossians says that it is written by Paul, but its language and style are not Paul's and some of the ideas are very different; did Paul change his mind with age, or could this have been written by someone else and ascribed to Paul, a practice common in those days? The scholars went through scripture carefully, trying to determine authorship, dating, any editing that might have occurred later. They also noted the differences in settings and theological perspectives: Isaiah 1-39 speaks theologically to the circumstances in Judah in the eighth century B.C. while the rest of the book proclaims quite a different message seemingly from a much later time.

In addition, nineteenth century scholars saw no need to take everything as though it were literal truth. They began to ask whether a particular miracle was a factual account or might it not be a faith statement or an interpretation of a event? If the Bible is made up of poetry and story and history and myth and genealogy, then one cannot take every verse as fact; one must decide what kind of literature it is and what significance it might have had for the people who told and retold it and then wrote it down.

The response to the historical criticism of the Bible was varied. Some rejected it outright. Extreme liberals used the scholarship to reduce Jesus to an ethical teacher who advocated only the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all peoples. Christians taking a middle position differed among themselves. Some moderates saw the scholarship as supporting traditional Christian doctrines and giving deeper insight into the difficult passages of the Bible: the book of Daniel, for example. Some were intrigued by the findings but had misgivings that the faith of the average Christian might be shaken, and that Bible reading in general might decline if it were thought that one needed scholarly help to understand it. Still other Christians were relieved. Because scholars were suggesting a "progressive theory" of revelation, in which primitive ideas of God were revealed first and

more sophisticated ones surfaced as humanity was able to receive them, it was easier for Christians to say that some parts of the Bible were more important than others--that the Sermon on the Mount revealed God's nature more fully than did the command to Saul to slaughter the Amalekites.⁶

German historical criticism was known and practiced by many in America in the first half of the century,⁷ but it was not emphasized, in part perhaps because Biblical study in America was confined to seminaries, whereas in Germany the historical critical methods were practiced in the academic settings of universities. The American seminaries were more concerned with sustaining the church and Christian life than they were in conducting academic research about the Bible. Then, of course, the Civil War began, and seminarians as well as the rest of the nation focused time and energy upon that conflict.⁸

Warfield was a conservative Presbyterian, and he responded to his times as a conservative, vigorously arguing the orthodox position against liberal Protestants, Unitarians, and the findings of the new criticism. He is best known today for his articles defending the plenary (that is, full and complete) inspiration of the Bible. His inaugural address at Western Theological Seminary at the beginning of his career was entitled "Inspiration and Criticism"⁹ and dealt with the infallibility of the Bible. In 1881 he co-

⁶ The above paragraphs are based upon material from W. Neil, "The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible, 1700-1950," and from Alan Richardson, "The Rise of Modern Biblical Scholarship and Recent Discussion of the Authority of the Bible," in The West from the Reformation to the Present Day, vol. 3 of The Cambridge History of the Bible, 294-338.

⁷ Jerry Wayne Brown, The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 7-8.

⁸ Brown, 180-81.

⁹ The address can be found in Appendix 2 of Benjamin B. Warfield, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1948), 419-42.

authored a now famous article with Princetonian A. A. Hodge entitled "Inspiration."¹⁰ And the subject continued to occupy Warfield's writings until his death in 1921.

For Warfield, biblical "Inspiration" (and the word is almost always capitalized in his writings) did not mean simply that the Bible was written by inspired people, nor did it mean that we, as we read it, are moved by the Holy Spirit to understand it as divine. Warfield defines *Inspiration* as "God's continued work of superintendence, by which, . . . He presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters He designed them to communicate, and hence constituting the entire volume in all its parts the Word of God to us."¹¹ The word *superintendence* is used often in Warfield's writings and it means just what it says: control, supervision, oversight with the power of direction. Warfield says that God did more than influence the writers of the Bible; God supervised and controlled everything they wrote.

Warfield distinguished between the historical processes and circumstances that were involved in the creation of scripture, and the fact of Inspiration or superintendence by God. In other words, Warfield agreed that the writings of scripture reflect the situations and personalities of their writers over a long period of time. God worked in a variety of ways upon the writers--nurturing certain people in certain times, preparing them with dreams and experiences, leading them to understand things in particular ways, creating a "fullness of time," as the Bible says. But, in addition, there was also God's direct control of what the writers finally produced. The superintendence or controlling aspect of God worked with

¹⁰ A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, "Inspiration," The Presbyterian Review 2 (April 1881): 225-60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

rather than disrupted the more providential or natural workings of God.¹² Nonetheless, the Inspiration of God was such that the Bible is "a record without error of the facts and doctrines He had commissioned His servants to teach."¹³ Inspiration accounts for "the absolute infallibility of the record . . . in the original autograph."¹⁴

The "original autograph" refers to the biblical texts as they were first written down. Of course, none of those original writings remain; we have only copies--some more, some less accurately reproduced. But Warfield believed that, despite corruptions in copying and editing, we have the original autograph of the major part of scripture. God in God's providence has not allowed the Bible to become hopelessly lost and confused.¹⁵ Warfield maintained that divine Inspiration of the "original autograph" was complete and extended to all its parts and that it involved the precise words used as well as the thoughts. Scripture not only contains the word of God; it is the Word of God, in the very words that God chose to have the Biblical writers put down.

To support the doctrine of Inspiration Warfield turned to the Bible itself, carefully exegeting passages like 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:19-21, and John 10:34-36 to illustrate that the Biblical writers and Jesus himself taught that scripture is inspired and without error. Warfield insisted that Christianity does not depend upon the doctrine of Inspiration. Revelation came before scripture's record of it, and Christianity would be true even if God had given only the revelation of salvation and not an infallible record of that revelation. Nonetheless, if the doctrine of Inspiration "was held and taught by the New Testament

¹² Ibid., 225-26. Similar ideas are found in Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," in The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, 154-57.

¹³ Hodge and Warfield, 228.

¹⁴ Ibid., 226.

¹⁵ Warfield, "Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," in Selected Shorter Writings, 2:583-84.

writers, we think it is an element of the Christian faith," and we cannot reject it "without logically undermining our trust in all the other elements of distinctive Christianity."¹⁶ One must point out, of course, that other scholars interpreted the above passages differently and did not see the biblical writers as teaching what had become the orthodox doctrine of Inspiration.

Where more liberal Christians agreed that the Bible is infallible on points of faith and practice, Warfield believed that the Bible is also without error on points of science, history, geography, and all other issues. He also maintained that the Bible did not contradict itself at any point. He acknowledged that there are instances in which the Bible seems to be inconsistent with history and science, and there are instances in which the Bible seems to be inconsistent with itself. Nonetheless, he asserted that most of those differences could be reconciled if (1) the facts of science and history could be compared with the Biblical text "in its original autograph," and (2) if the biblical text could be rightly interpreted as the author intended.

If you will notice, in his insistence upon interpreting texts "as the authors intended," Warfield was an inerrantist but not a literalist. He maintained that the Bible never professed literalness; it only asserted accuracy, and he believed that we must decide the intention of the writer before taking a passage literally or figuratively. Reading the texts according to what he saw as the writer's "intention," Warfield was able to get around such scientific problems as the age of humanity, which the literalists calculated according to the genealogies in Genesis.

Warfield was also open to Darwin's theories of evolutionary development; he wrote that, within limits, he could "raise no question as to the compatibility of the Darwinian form

¹⁶ Warfield, "The Real Problem of Inspiration," in The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, 212.

of the hypothesis of evolution with Christianity."¹⁷ Of course, for Warfield there could be no randomness about the process. He insisted that evolution included divine supervision; God, who had created matter out of nothingness, had chosen to create that matter so that it would modify and develop naturally, under God's own providential hand. Sudden leaps in development, even the human soul, could certainly be both natural and also according to God's will and guidance.

Warfield accepted many of the discoveries of science, but he continued to insist that the biblical writers were without error in everything they taught and that any seeming contradictions would be cleared up in the future. After all, there were always new developments in science and new discoveries about history. As study revealed more about the Bible and the intentions of its writers, and as archaeology and biology revealed more about history and science, everything would eventually be harmonized. In the meantime, there was no reason to reject the doctrine of plenary Inspiration just because we presently lack the knowledge to reconcile things.¹⁸

Warfield studied the historical criticism of the German scholars. Indeed, he believed biblical criticism to be necessary: "The critical examination of all the most intimate phenomena of the text of Scripture is an obvious duty, and its results, when humility, docility, and spiritual insight are added to competent learning and broad intelligence, must be eminently beneficial."¹⁹ But he usually rejected the conclusions of that criticism. For example, where historical criticism conflicted with direct statements of the Bible about

¹⁷ Warfield, as quoted in David N. Livingstone, "The Idea of Design: The Vicissitudes of a Key Concept in The Princeton Response to Darwin," Scottish Journal of Theology 37 (1984): 345.

¹⁸ Hodge and Warfield, 237-38. Also see Warfield, "The Real Problem of Inspiration," 218-20.

¹⁹ Hodge and Warfield, 243-44.

authorship, Warfield always sided with the biblical writers. His reasoning was that if the biblical writers asserted that Paul wrote Colossians, it was up to higher criticism, not simply to suggest alternative ideas, but to prove beyond any doubt that their theories were correct.²⁰

Warfield wrote constantly and passionately against many of the findings of the new criticism because he saw them as more than arguments over who wrote Colossians or questions about whether Quirinius was really governor at the time Jesus was born. He saw the new criticism as a threat to the integrity of the Bible itself:

The real problem brought before the churches by the present debate ought now to be sufficiently plain. In its deepest essence it is whether we can still trust the Bible as a guide in doctrine, and a teacher of truth. . . . It is specifically whether the results proclaimed by a special school of Biblical criticism . . . rests on a basis of evidence strong enough to meet and overcome the weight of evidence . . . which goes to show that the Biblical writers are trustworthy as teachers of doctrine. . . . The real question, in a word, is not a new question but the perennial old question, whether the basis of our doctrine is to be what the Bible teaches or what men teach."²¹

Because the authority and inspiration of the Bible was threatened in Warfield's day, those were the issues he addressed in his writings. He did not write extensively about how to interpret the scriptures he believed to be so fully inspired. That must be deduced from things he said generally and from examining his own interpretive work. The following principles, most of them already mentioned, can serve as guides:

A. Because every word of scripture is inspired, careful study to determine precise meaning in original languages is important.

B. Because all parts of scripture are inspired, nothing can be ignored as, for example, Luther tended to ignore James.

²⁰ Warfield, "The Real Problem of Inspiration," 171-72.

²¹ Ibid., 226.

C. The historical context of the Bible must be considered, but no mere speculation about biblical characters or feeling or circumstances is allowed; we do not add to the text.

D. Higher criticism may be consulted but must be rejected if it contradicts any direct statement in scripture.

E. The intent of the writer must be considered; many texts were not meant to be taken literally.

F. We work to harmonize scripture with science and scripture with scripture, but we do not despair if we cannot do so at present; new knowledge will ultimately reconcile things.

G. Because the Bible is "a record without error of the facts and doctrines He had commissioned His servants to teach,"²² we must look for the facts and lessons and doctrines that God has provided in the text.

In addition to the above, and while Warfield placed great stress upon the authority and full inspiration of scripture, he believed that proper reason and a receptive spirit were necessary in order to understand or interpret it. He insisted that God's truth can only be known through a proper balance amongst authority, the intellect, and the heart.²³ Exaggeration of any of these three factors will result in a distortion of the truth. If authority is stressed too strongly, it becomes traditionalism and forces us accept things which proper reason rejects. If intellect is given too great a leeway, sterile rationalism develops, leading to a building up of systems solely based upon logic. If the heart is given preference, mysticism results and ultimately takes the designs of its own imagination to be divine revelations. Objective and infallible authority is necessary to ground the heart, intellect is needed to interpret and build upon authority, the heart is needed to incorporate the

²² Hodge and Warfield, 228.

²³ Warfield, "Authority, Intellect, Heart," of Selected Shorter Writings, 2:668-71.

understood truth into one's life. Warfield was far from being a rigid traditionalist. While he believed scripture to be authoritative, he had also experienced its power to engage the mind and inspire the heart.

Discussion of Warfield's Position

1. Go back to the "Questionnaire Regarding Scripture" and have the class decide how Warfield might respond to questions 1, 4, and 10.

2. Warfield is studied by many conservative Christians today. What are the strengths of his position of plenary Inspiration? (In our ever changing world, a fully inspired Bible offers an objective truth which is fixed and can be trusted. In addition, people may be more likely to take the Bible seriously and study it if they think that its words are actually God's words.)

3. What are some of the weaknesses of Warfield's position? (One may spend too much time trying to reconcile statements in the Bible with history or science and fail to concentrate on God's revelation to us in Jesus Christ. Warfield managed both but many today seem too involved in the former.)

4. Ask the class members if they personally go to scripture to learn facts and doctrine; or if they go to hear about God's graciousness in Jesus Christ, as Luther did; or if they go hoping to encounter Christ himself and perhaps have their hearts "burn within" them, as Schleiermacher suggested)? If they go to scripture as did Luther or Schleiermacher, do they need a Bible which is inerrant in all details? Can God not speak to them and make their hearts burn through the Bible, whether it is inerrant or not? These sorts of questions should lead to discussion of whether God's inspiration is an objective thing, of the writers as they wrote; or whether Inspiration is a more subjective thing, of us as we read and study.

5. *Inerrancy* is, for Warfield, closely linked to the authority of scripture. Is it possible to reject an inerrantist position and yet maintain that scripture is authoritative?

What, aside from inerrancy, might give the Bible authority, or make us take it as authoritative?

6. The class has been told that Warfield was an *inerrantist* but not a *literalist*. Which label has more to do with the inspiration of scripture and which has to do with its interpretation? Ultimately, which issue do they think is the more important--what one believes about inspiration or how one interprets scripture? Why? Have the class discuss the importance of each label as it refers to the "creationist" position of many in our day. We have already discussed some of the dangers of allegorical interpretation; is there just as much danger in being too literal? Cite examples. When we are confronted with people with whom we disagree, might it help to know whether the issue is inerrancy or literal interpretation? How?

Analysis of Sermon

1. Ask for responses to question 1 of the handout, about which theologian Warfield seems closest to. Give them some time to state their reasons for their choices.

2. Before moving on to the other questions, ask the class if they saw in this sermon an attack against liberal Christianity (look at paragraphs 4-10). Was this informative or distracting to class members?

3. Turn now to the words and doctrines put up on the newsprint in response to what the class found in question 2. Does the class see Warfield's emphasis upon the truths and teachings of scripture? What were some of the lessons or truths that Warfield pointed out as given (or not given) in the Luke text? Doctrines might include Atonement, God the Father, Grace, Sin, the Deity of Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit. Messages or points might be that God rejoices like the father in the parable when we sinners repent and turn to God (paragraphs 3, 12, 18, 21, etc.), and that there "is no depth of degradation, return from which will not be welcomed by God" (paragraph 18). Ask the class if approaching scripture looking for messages or doctrines seems intellectual or cold? Does Warfield's

sermon seem doctrinal or cold? (It seems quite moving to me, though the class may have other ideas.)

While going to scripture to find doctrine may seem too intellectual, many today go to scripture and can make little sense out of it; perhaps approaching it with certain doctrines already in mind may not be a bad idea. Does it work in this sermon? Would it work for those who are not familiar with basic Christian doctrine?

4. Question 3 on the handout might illicit several responses: that Warfield does interpret the parts in light of the general message of there being joy in heaven when sinners repent; that Warfield preaches about the parable in relationship to its general setting and the two preceding parables; that, in going off to discuss secondary issues--the divinity of Jesus in paragraph 14, for example--Warfield is discussing what is indeed a part in that scripture but not really as it is related to the whole of the parable.

5. In question 4 about the intent of the speaker/writer, some in the class might mention that paragraphs 5, 10, and 12 all talk about what the purpose of the parable is not. Paragraph 11 talks about "Our Lord, with His exquisitely nice adjustment of every detail of this parable to His purpose, . . . has omitted nothing needed for the most poignant conveyance of the meaning He intended it to convey." Paragraph 16 talks about Jesus using the elder brother to get through the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. Other passages may be mentioned. Warfield seems sensitive to the author's intent.

6. Question 5 contains a Warfield quotation about authority, intellect, and heart all being necessary to discern and incorporate God's truth. What sort of balance did they find in Warfield's sermon? Have them cite the examples they found. Do the class members personally prefer an emphasis of one or another side of Warfield's triangle of truth?

7. What other things impressed the class about Warfield's sermon?

Summary

Most of the summarizing has already been done in the above discussions. But you might ask the class to list some of the difficulties facing Christianity in Warfield's day. (Liberalism, loose morals, scientific discoveries, historical criticism), and have them describe Warfield's response. Also have the class define *inerrancy*, *literalism*, and the doctrine of Plenary Inspiration, in their own words.

Final Details and Prayer:

Give out the sermon of Karl Barth (handout 6)²⁴ and close with the following:
O Lord God who knows and understands our human frailties, enable us to hear and respond to your good news in Jesus Christ. Enable us also to understand and respond in love to others whose position on doctrine is different from our own. Amen.

²⁴ Karl Barth, "Remember the Lord," in Deliverance to the Captives, trans. Marguerite Wieser (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), 109-16.

CHAPTER 6

Lesson on Karl Barth

Notes to the Teacher

1. If possible, preach Barth's sermon (or have it preached) on the Sunday prior to the class.
2. Choose a Mozart selection and have it playing as the class assembles.
3. Have a copy of the Grünewald Crucifixion (from the Tauberbischofsheim altar) displayed for discussion. You can enlarge it from any art book--copying is wonderful these days--but be sure that the copy is in color.
4. Also gather up as many volumes of Barth's Church Dogmatics as you can find, just to show the extent of his work.
5. Look through some biblical commentaries and find one or two that give good background material on authorship, language analysis, textual variants, etc., but that give little insight into the actual meaning of passages as God's Word to us.
6. The opening prayer is adapted from one by Barth; copy it and hand it out to the class to pray together. The closing prayer can be the prayer that follows the sermon on Handout 6.

Lesson Overview

Objective:

The class will be able to state two things that impressed them about Karl Barth, the man. They will be able to describe Barth's position that scripture's authority lies in its witness to God's self-revelation. They will be able to describe Barth's interpretative method of noting patterns throughout scripture. They will look at Barth's sermon, both for theological content and method of interpretation.

Lesson Plan in Outline:

A. Opening Prayer.

- B. Presentation of Material about Barth's Life.
- C. Discussion of Barth's Position on Scripture.
- D. Analysis of Barth's Method and Sermon.
- E. Summary.
- F. Final Details and Closing Prayer.

Lesson Content

Prayer

O Lord, our God! You know who we are:

persons with good consciences and persons with bad,
 persons who are content and those who are discontent,
 persons who are certain and those who are uncertain,
 Christians by conviction and Christians by convention,
 those who believe, those who half-believe, those who disbelieve.

And you know from where we have come:

from a circle of relatives, acquaintances, and friends,
 or from the greatest loneliness,
 from a life of quiet prosperity or from much confusion and distress,
 from relationships that are well ordered or from those disordered or under stress,
 from the inner circle of the Christian community or from its outer edge.

But now we all stand before you,

in all our differences,
 and yet alike in that we all are in the wrong with you and with one another,
 alike in that we all must one day die,
 alike in that we all would be lost without your grace,
 but also alike in that your grace is promised and made available to us all
 in your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are here together in order to praise you through letting you speak to us.

We ask that you allow this to take place in this hour,

in the name of your Son our Lord. Amen.¹

Material on Barth's Life

The music the class is hearing and the Grünewald Crucifixion it sees were both important to Swiss-born Karl Barth. Biographers say that Barth began each day listening to Mozart. He once wrote that, "whether the angels play only Bach in praising God I am not quite sure; I am sure, however, that *en famille* they play Mozart and that then also God the Lord is especially delighted to listen to them."² One reason Barth gravitated to Mozart was because in Mozart, "Yes" rings stronger than the still existing "No," a truth that Barth believed to be God's basic attitude towards humanity.

The Grünewald painting is a far more somber piece of art than is Mozart's thrilling music, but it is important as a visual symbol of Barth's position regarding scripture. Barth discussed the figure of John the Baptist in the painting, suggesting that John provides a function similar to that of the Bible; that is, both are witnesses to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. As John points away from himself and towards the ugly but divine figure on the cross, so the Bible points away from itself and towards the true revelation of God, Jesus Christ. The Bible is not the Word of God in itself but only human words witnessing to Jesus Christ who is the Word of God Revealed.³

¹ Author's adaptation of the Karl Barth prayer that opens "You Shall Be My People," in Deliverance to the Captives, 60-61.

² Karl Barth, "Letter of Thanks to Mozart," as quoted in Georges Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, trans. Robert McAfee Brown (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1964), 52.

³ Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, vol. 1, pt. 1, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 112-13.

Karl Barth was born in Basel, Switzerland, in 1886. His father was a professor of theology in Bern.⁴ Barth attended mainly Germany universities, where he learned from the finest theologians of the day, most of them liberal scholars who followed and built upon the position of Friederich Schleiermacher. Most of these theologians analyzed the human situation or the history of religions and then made a case for Christianity based upon its being the best religion or the one most able to address the human situation. They believed with Schleiermacher that a relationship with Jesus Christ was the essence of Christianity, but they usually saw that relationship to be with the historical man Jesus rather than with the risen Christ, for they considered the latter to be a creation of the early church. They therefore used their scholarship to get behind the biblical texts and learn about the *real* Jesus. As humans work to get in touch with this superior human, they can achieve understanding of God and grow to be better people. The liberal theologians also believed, for they were seeing remarkable progress in science and technology, that humans were indeed getting better and working to create the world that Jesus said God wants. God and humans were united in an enterprise to make the world better, and as people drew closer to Jesus, they drew closer to God and could do God's will.

At age twenty-five Barth went to pastor a church in Safenwil, Switzerland. Safenwil was a working-class, industrial town, and the people there did not respond to Barth's preaching about humanity's quest for union with Jesus. Liberal theology might have spoken to the educated and the well-off, but it seemed to do little for the poor and oppressed. Barth went back to the Bible and, as he read, he found that it was not about human striving to unite with God and make the world better. Instead the Bible told about God's actions and God's grace and God's forgiveness and God's determination to create

⁴ Most of the biographical material is from Casalis, and from John Bowden, Karl Barth (London: SCM Press, 1971).

God's Kingdom. In addition, the God of the Bible was so radically different from humans that there was no way for humans to find and unite with God; only as God stooped to connect with humans was there possibility for knowledge of God. As Barth saw it, the Bible described a world "unified not by our relation to the divine but by a specific God's relation to us."⁵ The emphasis was first and always upon God.

When World War I began, Barth discarded liberal theology completely. Most of his liberal teachers enthusiastically supported "Kaiser and Vaterland," demonstrating for Barth the folly of beginning any Christian theology with religion and using human experience as its basis. While religion might be the highest quest for humanity and while human experience is indeed an element of that, both religion and human experience can be distorted to serve human purposes. Human attempts to work towards God can only create a God made in human terms, and human attempts to make the world better through religion can only lead to human disaster. The starting point of theology could therefore never be human experience that somehow led to God; it could only be God's revelation of God's self. And that revelation has been made in Jesus the Christ. In Jesus the Christ God said "No" to our human strivings to reach God and said "Yes" to freely giving us God's self-revelation.

One critic has pointed out that Barth actually built upon Schleiermacher and the centrality of Jesus Christ; Barth, however, reversed Schleiermacher's procedure, "inquiring not into Jesus' place in our story but into our place in his"⁶:

Instead of interpreting Christianity by the general character and function of religion, [Barth] interprets religion, including Christian religion, by Christianity's differentiating specificity [that is, Jesus Christ]. Instead of analyzing human

⁵ Robert W. Jenson, "Karl Barth," in The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century, ed. David Ford, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 21.

⁶ Ibid., 34.

existence, in order then to inquire after Christ's contribution to its religious aspect, he analyzes Christ's existence, in order then to inquire after our religion's place therein.⁷

From this controlling truth--God's revelation of God's self in Jesus Christ--Barth began to build his own system of theology. He was invited to professorships at the University of Göttingen, the University at Münster, and finally the University of Bonn. He also continued to write, producing a six-million-word, seven-thousand-page, twelve-volume Dogmatics (unfinished) along with fifty or so other books and hundreds of articles. Many refer to Barth's work as neo-orthodox for, in the process of structuring his theology around the God who reveals God's self in Jesus Christ, Barth revived or re-interpreted many of the traditional orthodox doctrines--the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of election and the doctrine of Holy Scripture to name three.

In the midst of writing the Dogmatics and teaching in German universities, Barth also became a spokesman for the church against the rise of Hitler. The Catholics compromised with Hitler, pledging loyalty to the führer and prohibiting any political activity by priests. Much of the Lutheran Church followed suit. Hitler's "German Christians" proposed a new Church, based upon the key words of Nazism: "Nation, Race, Führer." One of the published statements of the German Christians said:

We take our stand upon the ground of positive Christianity. We profess an affirmation and typical faith in Christ, corresponding to the German spirit of Luther and to a heroic piety We see in race, folk, and nation orders of existence granted and entrusted to us by God. God's law for us is that we look to the preservation of these orders
In the mission to the Jews we perceive a grave danger to our nationality. It is an entrance gate for alien blood into our body politic. It has no justification for existence beside foreign missions In particular, marriage between Germans and Jews is to be forbidden.⁸

⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁸ Quoted in Casalis, 23.

In the wake of German Christian enthusiasm, the Evangelical Church of Germany almost fell, tempted by patriotism and sustained mainly by a Christianity based upon human experience. But Barth wrote against the German Christians from the same emphatic position he had attacked liberal Christianity--the position that Jesus Christ alone is, and Jesus Christ alone will ever be, "führer" of the church and guide for all it does. In 1934 Barth helped organize the "Confessing Church" and wrote most of its defiant reply to the German Christians--the Theological Declaration of Barman. (At this point you might want to read some of the Declaration to the class.⁹) Karl Barth helped a hesitant church become strong and confident of its position for Christ.

Barth was forced out of Germany in 1935 and settled in Basel, where he continued to teach and work out his Dogmatics. But he also wrote to people of various countries to encourage them in their stand against Hitler. Because of his status in the Christian world and because of his articulate writings, the Nazis always considered Barth one of their most dangerous enemies.

After the war Barth returned to Germany, to teach and to take up the cause of Germany in defeat: "the sovereign God who opposes the violent is also the God whose grace raises up and offers a new beginning to those destroyed by his judgment."¹⁰ Once again, the God who in righteousness says "No" to humans also stoops in grace to say "Yes" to humans.

Karl Barth died in his sleep on December 10, 1968.

Barth's Position on Scripture

1. Two half-volumes of Barth's Dogmatics were devoted to the Word of God. Barth wrote that God's Word comes to us in three forms: the Word preached, the Word written

⁹ "The Theological Declaration of Barman," Book of Confessions, 8.01-8.28.

¹⁰ Barth as quoted in Casalis, 32-33.

(the Bible), and Jesus Christ the Word revealed.¹¹ However the Word is, essentially and always, the last of those forms--the Word revealed in Jesus Christ.¹² And because God's self-revelation in Jesus is an event, as opposed to the Bible and preaching which are reports or proclamations about the event, the Word revealed cannot be equated with the Bible or with preaching. Preaching and the Bible are only "derivatively and indirectly"¹³ God's Word; they function as witnesses to the Word. Like John in the Gr newald Crucifixion, the Word preached and the Word written can only point to the Jesus Christ, the Word revealed. However, Barth also asserted that, when God in God's grace enables us through faith to see that to which the witnesses point, then the Word preached or written can become an event of revelation; they can become God's Word.

In several places Barth likens scripture's becoming of the Word of God to the waters of the Pool of Bethesda. The waters of the pool, in and of themselves, had no healing power and the sick could only sit beside them in hope; but when God caused the waters to move, then they became a means of healing. In the same way, scripture can be read time and again and, although we may understand what it says, the words may remain simply words to us, without saving power. But when the Holy Spirit moves and in mercy allows us to experience the mystery of God revealed, then scripture becomes God's self-revealing Word to us.¹⁴

(At this point you may want to stop and share with the class times when this has happened for you or them personally. Does this idea of scripture becoming the Word of God make sense to them? Is this similar to Schleiermacher's sermon about Christ "opening the

¹¹ Barth, Church Dogmatics, 1/1:88.

¹² Ibid., 1/1:111-24.

¹³ Ibid., 1/1:117.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1/1:111.

scriptures" so that the disciples hearts "were burning" within them? Remember that, in Luke, the disciples did not see the Word of God, i.e., the risen Lord, as he opened scripture for them; they saw the risen Lord only later, after the meal. On the other hand, it did take the Lord to open for them what they did see in scripture. In other words, whatever we understand or do not understand in scripture is not because scripture is or contains the Word of God, but because, when God enables us to see in faith, scripture can become God's revelation or Word for us. At any rate, Barth would probably caution against Schleiermacher's emphasis on the human experience of this event; while it was a human experience, it was first and foremost a generous act of God's self-revelation to the disciples--Barth would say that we must start always with God's acts, not with human experience.)

Barth's insistence that scripture is only "derivatively" God's Word, that it is only a "witness" to God's Word unless and until God makes it become God's Word, is different from Warfield's assertion that the very words of scripture are God's words and therefore the Bible is the Word of God. Barth did not want anything, not even the Bible, to be identified with the revealed Word, the Word made Flesh in Jesus Christ. The revealed Word is an event, a miracle who occurred and who continues to occur but who cannot be equated with any book. In this Barth was emphasizing God's freedom. If the Bible contains or is identified with God's Word, then the Word or self-revelation of God is bound to that book--limited, able to be analyzed and interpreted by humans; it becomes then a "paper Pope."¹⁵ But God's Word, God's self-revelation, is always a generous gift to us, occurring in Jesus Christ and also occurring again and again, when and how God

¹⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, pt. 2, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 525.

chooses to give it. It can indeed come to us through the Bible, but it is not statically there to be possessed.

From Barth's position--that the Bible is not but can become God's Word--we see that Barth stress two points of inspiration rather than one. Warfield had emphasized, as did most orthodox Christians of the time, the Bible's inspiration at the time of writing; the Holy Spirit was at work as the Biblical writers spoke or wrote. Barth would not deny this, but in addition he maintained that the Holy Spirit must also be at work if we sinful humans are to hear or understand the witness of those who spoke or wrote.¹⁶ Barth maintained that this double-inspiration position was the one held by Luther and Calvin and that only later did Christians begin to emphasize its original inspiration and make inerrancy a part of that inspiration. This was because they wanted (and so do we) to possess the perfect and infallible words of God and not be dependent upon God's revelation to come to us as a free gift. They (and we) want "tangible certainty"¹⁷ rather than the mystery of grace that is given over and over again. In Barth's opinion the so-called "orthodox" position held from the seventeenth century up to today is a sinful distortion of the Reformers' position.

With the concept of the Holy Spirit at work enabling the Bible to become God's Word, Barth could easily do away with the idea of scripture's infallibility. Certainly the Holy Spirit had inspired the original writers; but "the prophets and apostles as such, even in their office, even in their function as witnesses, even in the act of writing down their witness, were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word."¹⁸ In fact, the fallibility of the Bible is part of the miracle of God's self-revelation: God's revelation can

¹⁶ Ibid., 1/2:517-23.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1/2:524.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1/2:529.

and does come to us through the witness of quite fallible human beings. As for us, it is presumptuous to insist that God's Word can only be revealed in infallibility. God is free to do as God chooses; God chose that God's original revelation to us come in fallible human flesh; why should not the witness to revelation come to us in fallible human words:

If God was not ashamed of the fallibility of all the human words of the Bible, of their historical and scientific inaccuracies, their theological contradictions, the uncertainty of their tradition, and, above all, their Judaism, but adopted and made use of these expressions in all their fallibility, we do not need to be ashamed when He wills to renew it to us in all its fallibility as witness, and it is mere self-will and disobedience to try to find some infallible elements in the Bible.¹⁹

While Barth dismissed the need (and our demand) for an infallible Bible, he did not dismiss parts of the Bible the way Luther seemed to do and the way we do in effect by ignoring them. He rejected the idea that some of the Bible is God's Word and some is not. We cannot pick and choose in the Bible, on the basis of reason or Christian experience or even on the basis of whether it speaks the gospel or not. All of scripture witnesses to God's Word and any part of it can become the Word in fact--if God chooses to make it so. The following quotation from the Dogmatics reveals this aspect of Barth's doctrine, but it does more. The Dogmatics are long, often abstract and repetitive. But they are also very beautiful in many places. This is one of the many beautiful passages:

(If possible read this quotation directly from the Dogmatics. It will make Barth's work seem more alive and accessible.)

Of the book [the Bible] as we have it, we can only say: We recollect that we have heard in this book the Word of God; we recollect, in and with the Church, that the Word of God has been heard in all this book and in all parts of it; therefore we expect that we shall hear the Word of God in this book again, and hear it even in those places where we ourselves have not heard it before. Yet the presence of the Word of God itself, the real and present speaking and hearing of it, is not identical with the existence of the book as such. But in this presence something takes place in and with the book, for which the book as such does indeed give the possibility, but the reality of which cannot be anticipated or replaced by the existence of the book. A free divine decision is made. It then comes about that

¹⁹ Barth, Church Dogmatics, 1/2:531.

the Bible . . . is taken and used as an instrument in the hand of God, i.e., it speaks to and is heard by us as the authentic witness to divine revelation and is therefore present as the Word of God.²⁰

This, then, is the Bible's authority for Barth. Authority does not lie in its inerrancy nor in its verbal inspiration, but in the fact that through it God's Word encounters us. Human efforts to find God through other means are futile; human efforts to find God through other means are also ungrateful, since God in God's grace has come in Flesh to find us and is continuing to give us again and again his self-revelation in the witness of the Bible.

2. As the above discussion might indicate, Barth's interpretation of scripture was not mainly concerned with finding in it doctrines about God, nor was it directed toward human experience or morality or finding the historical Jesus. Barth went to scripture looking for the Word of God within the words of the biblical witnesses, looking for the matter and meaning within the document,²¹ remembering always that only the Holy Spirit could reveal the Word in the words, the matter within the document.

Scholars have pointed out that Barth himself used many different methods to interpret scripture.²² But two things might be said at the outset. In the first place Barth did not object to historical criticism; in fact, he made use of it himself. But he thought that criticism was useless when it gave background material only and made no effort to get at the meaning of the text itself. Who cares how many sources are in Genesis or who cares who wrote Colossians if that information does not help us understand the text as it points to the

²⁰ Ibid., 1/2:530.

²¹ Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, as paraphrased in Mark I. Wallace, "Karl Barth's Hermeneutic," Journal of Religion 63 (July 1988): 398.

²² D. F. Ford, "Barth's Interpretation of the Bible, in " Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method, ed. S. W. Sykes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 398. See also David H. Kelsey, The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 39.

Word of God? (At this point you might show the class one of the commentaries that explains scholarly issues well but is no help with the actual biblical message.)

For Barth, "The universal rule of interpretation is that a text can be read and understood and expounded only with reference to and in the light of its theme."²³ This may seem common sense to us, but the historical criticism of the day seldom even considered the theme of scripture in their attempts to explain its textual variants and near-east counterparts. As one scholar wrote: the historical critical method put "emphasis on the Bible's historical situation at the expense of its theological message."²⁴ (Again you might show an example of this from a commentary. Ask the class if they see that, while Warfield rejected historical criticism when it contradicted the facts and testimony of the biblical writers, Barth was more concerned that criticism ignored the real subject-matter of the Bible--God's Word to us? Let the class discuss, if they need to.)

As Barth saw it, this failure of historical criticism to consider the theme or subject-matter of scripture was also the failing of Schleiermacher's approach to scripture. Barth commented briefly on Schleiermacher's method in university lectures in 1923-24.²⁵ He seemed to have had no quarrel with Schleiermacher's method of approaching communication from a grammatical and from a psychological point of view, nor with interpreting parts of a communication in view of the whole and vice versa. What concerned Barth most was that, as he saw it, Schleiermacher failed to consider the content of scripture; he made no effort to add into his method of interpretation the subject matter of this particular communication as the Word of God. For Barth whatever method/s one

²³ Barth, Church Dogmatics, 1/2:493.

²⁴ Wallace, 399.

²⁵ Karl Barth, The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923-24, ed. Dietrich Ritschl (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 178-83.

might use to interpret scripture, one must keep in mind that these words witness to the Word and that the Holy Spirit can make the Word understandable regardless of the method used. (I am not sure that this is a valid criticism of Schleiermacher. While Schleiermacher did not explicitly speak of scripture's peculiar content, his method of reading parts only in light of the whole would suggest that he considered the subject matter of his material. Certainly, although Schleiermacher's reading of scripture might be different from Barth's, he always considered it to be the Word of God, with the ability to lead us to encounter Jesus Christ.)

While Barth used historical criticism, his main approach to scripture was theological and his main methods, literary.²⁶ He used some of Schleiermacher's parts-in-light-of-the-whole, whole-in-the-light-of-the-parts methodology but he went beyond, noting patterns and subtle allusions in scripture. He seldom inquired into the "intention" of the writers as did Warfield, in part because he thought that, regardless of the author's intentions, the biblical text is something different for the interpreter because of the text's relationship to other texts by other writers. Barth therefore worked with scripture "as a crisscrossing of veiled and sundry figures and types that anticipate and allude to one another. Like contemporary critics, Barth, with remarkable sophistication, highlights the imaginative literary dynamics that carry the meaning of the Bible's central characters and incidents."²⁷

For example, Barth described the role of Paul as completing the work of Judas--with a twist: Judas handed Jesus over to his enemies and ultimately to the Gentiles to be put to death. Paul also handed Jesus over to the Gentiles, but in order that the Gentiles might have life. Judas, in his actions, was unfaithful and intended evil; Paul, in similar actions,

²⁶ Most of the following is based upon the Wallace article cited above.

²⁷ Wallace, 404.

was faithful and intended salvation.²⁸ That interpretation may not be what comes first to our minds as we read the stories of Judas and Paul, and the biblical writers themselves may not have intended the similarities, but literary critics of today would probably applaud Barth's insight. Of course, Barth was not interested in literary criticism for its own sake but for its help in illuminating God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. In this case, as Barth saw it, both Judas and Paul acted in response to God's self-revelation in Jesus, and they both witnessed to the fact that God can and does use the most unfaithful among us to accomplish God's saving purposes.

Another example of Barth's literary approach to the Bible can be seen in his discussion of election. Barth analyzed the Old Testament stories of Cain and Able, Jacob and Esau, Saul and David, in order to demonstrate that the history of Israel is structured throughout by God's election and rejection. Barth asserted that all of those previous elections and rejections point to and converge in Jesus Christ. On the cross Jesus endured God's full rejection and in the Resurrection the rejected man Jesus was elected by God. All of this indicated for Barth that, in Jesus Christ, God has elected all those previously rejected.²⁹ In his self-revelation to us, God demonstrated that he says "Yes" to those to whom God had previously said "No." This is a simplistic summary of a very complicated argument in the Dogmatics but, whether or not one agrees with Barth's conclusions on election, one must admit that the pattern of election and rejection does exist in the Old Testament and that it does exist in the events of crucifixion and Resurrection. Barth saw the literary pattern and used it to witness to God's self-revelation.

In summary, Barth used historical criticism and literary analysis, but only in order that the theological content of the Bible remain the primary focus:

²⁸ Wallace, 404-05.

²⁹ As discussed in Ford, 65.

Barth's overarching theological concern is to understand the Bible as something more than a finely crafted literary text or historically determined cultural artifact. Instead, the Bible should be read on its own terms as a living theological voice--its literary intricacies and historical antecedents are not to be studied as ends in themselves but as means to the end that the divine life itself might be revealed to the interpreter of these texts under the aegis and guidance of the Holy Spirit.³⁰

That latter "guidance of the Holy Spirit" was, for Barth, the most important factor. Careful historical and literary analysis are both useless unless God chooses to reveal God's self in the text of Holy Scripture.

Analysis of Barth's Methods and Sermon

1. Begin with question 5 on the sermon handout. Whether the sermon was preached or merely read, was anyone in the class moved by the sermon? (Being "moved" is, of course, a human experience and one more related to Schleiermacher, but religious experience is an important factor for most people today.)

The second part of question 5 is more Barthian in nature and may appeal to different people in the class: did anyone get a glimpse of the self-revealing God as they heard or read the sermon? (Let the class discuss the difference in these questions and their responses, and remind them that Barth himself ends this sermon reiterating his often-made point that, only as God enables us are we able to see anything, or in this case, "remember him." These special glimpses or times of remembering are gifts of grace to us, but Barth says that we can pray for these special gifts with the assurance that God has given them in the past and, in God's own time, God will most certainly give them to us again.)

2. Now go back to question 1. Was the emphasis in this sermon upon God's action or upon our human experience? Let the class discuss a bit, referring to the evidence they found of either. Paragraphs 1 and 2 all emphasize God. Paragraphs 7 and following deal with human experience but in terms of its inadequacy and need; God is spoken of as giving

³⁰ Wallace, 408.

us power to overcome our inadequacy and need. While paragraph 15 suggests things that we can do to "remember him," the sermon concludes once again stating that only God can give us power to do this.

3. What did the class find in answer to question 2, about doctrine. (No stated doctrines, but implied doctrines of humanity and God.) Does doctrine or information about God and humanity seem primary or is Barth trying for something different? Does the class think that Barth's sermon witnesses to the Word revealed? Is it an example of "the Word preached"?

4. Questions 3 and 4 were directed toward interpretation. Is there evidence of interpreting parts in light of the whole? (Barth does speak of the larger context of his text.) Does Barth make significant use of patterns--the election pattern spoken of earlier, for example? (The *journey* motif is one used frequently in the Bible as is the emphasis upon God's good gifts, but Barth does not make much use of them, nor does he relate characters to one another in the Judas/Paul analysis. The sermon is straightforward and uncomplicated.). Does the sermon have more of an historical emphasis or a literary analysis emphasis or a theological emphasis? (While Barth probably did historical-critical work on this text, it is not in evidence, nor is there significant use of literary methods. The theological content of the text--God's gift of power--is the focus.) Is this in keeping with Barth's general attitude toward scripture?

5. How did the class respond to the Judas/Paul analogy and the rejection/election pattern Barth saw in scripture? Do his points seem valid to you or are they as far-fetched as some of Gregory's allegories? Was Barth pushing his own particular doctrines onto scripture as Gregory seemed to do?

6. Let the class talk about how Barth's concentration upon Jesus Christ differs from Luther's and Schleiermacher's.

7. Did anyone notice that Barth did not use the entire 18th verse, that he ends his chosen text at "power," leaving out "to get wealth?" Is this acceptable to the class? Does this make anyone suspicious of Barth's general approach to scripture? How might Barth have gotten around the problem without ignoring it as he did?

8. What other things caught the attention of the class?

Summary

Ask the class members what impressed them about Barth as a man. Ask them where Barth might have answered questions 1 and 10 of our questionnaire. Ask class members to state Barth's position on biblical authority; ask them to describe how Barth tended to interpret scripture.

The following is something Barth said near the end of his life:

The angels laugh at old Karl. They laugh at him because he tries to grasp the truth about God in a book of Dogmatics. They laugh at the fact that volume follows volume and each is thicker than the previous one. As they laugh, they say to one another, "Look! Here he comes now with his little pushcart full of volumes of the Dogmatics!"³¹

Have the class discuss this quotation in relationship to Barth's criticism of both liberal and conservative orthodox positions. (Barth seems to see himself as guilty as anyone of trying to find or possess God. He had criticized Schleiermacher for beginning with religion and trying to work up to the truth about God; he criticized the orthodox position of scripture because it identified the Word of God with infallible words in a book in order to possess that Word. But his own Dogmatics are evidence of his similar sin. However, Barth might say that he was only witnessing to truth and that at least he began with the correct focus, the Word revealed in Jesus Christ.)

³¹ As quoted in Casalis, xiii.

Final Details and Prayer:

Give out the sermon by Paul Tillich and the story of "Big Mike and Little Mike" (handouts 7a³² and 7b). Explain that the second handout will help them understand Tillich's approach to scripture. Close with the prayer at the end of Handout 6.

³² Paul Tillich, "The New Being," in The Essential Tillich, ed. F. Forrester Church (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987), 90-97.

CHAPTER 7

Lesson on Paul Tillich

Notes to the Teacher

Today you will be using the Grünewald crucifixion from the Barth lesson; if you can find a copy of Georges Roualt's "Christ and the Fishermen" or "Head of Christ," bring it/them in as well.

As in the past, we will consider where Tillich might stand in relation to a few of the questions on the beginning questionnaire.

Lesson Overview

Objective:

The class members will be able to state two facts about Tillich's life. They will be able to define and illustrate Tillich's understanding of symbol. They will be able to list some of the symbols Tillich found in the Bible and describe their correlation with the human condition.

Lesson Plan in Outline:

- A. Opening Prayer.
- B. A Brief Look at Tillich's Sermon.
- C. Material about Tillich's Life and Thought
- D. Discussion of Tillich's Position on Scripture.
- E. A Return to the Tillich's Sermon.
- F. Summary
- G. Final Details and Closing Prayer.

Lesson Content

Prayer

Open our minds and hearts, O God, and enable us to examine our lives and look carefully at our culture. Open our minds and hearts, O God, that we may hear afresh your

message of healing for our lives and your message of transformation for our culture.

Amen.

Discussion of Tillich's Sermon

Go through the first two questions/tasks at the end of handout 7a. Write down on a chalk board or newsprint any new words or phrases that people underlined; tell the class that some of these terms will become clear as the class progresses.

Allow the class members to talk briefly about which theologian seems closest to Tillich. Tell them that the other questions will be considered after hearing about Tillich's life and his approach to scripture.

Material on Tillich's Life

1. Paul Tillich was born in 1886, the same year as Karl Barth. While Barth was Swiss and Reformed, Tillich was German and Lutheran. Tillich's father was a pastor in the Evangelical Church of Prussia, serving both in parish churches and in administrative positions within the Prussian Church.¹ Tillich's mother, reportedly more progressive and open than her conservative husband, died when Tillich was seventeen. Tillich attended university at Halle, Berlin, and Breslau, and in 1912 was ordained in the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union, a denomination containing both Lutherans and Calvinists.

Tillich joined the German army to serve as chaplain throughout World War I. He ministered to German soldiers at the front lines, winning two Iron Crosses for valor but suffering three nervous breakdowns during that same period. The overwhelming horrors of war, together with the accompanying experience that faith and hope still remained within him, changed Tillich's thinking completely. For him, even more than for Barth, the war marked the end of former ideas about God and the Christian faith. Tillich reported that,

¹ Most of the biographical material is from John P. Newport, Paul Tillich (Waco, Tex: Word Books, 1984), 22-61.

during the war, he became an existentialist and began paying closer attention to specific events in life rather than reasoning solely about abstract ideals.²

In the spring of 1919 Tillich became an instructor at the University of Berlin. He moved from teaching positions in Marburg, Dresden, and Leipzig, to become Professor of Philosophy at the University of Frankfurt in 1929. Tillich had married just before the war but that relationship ended in divorce. He then married Hannah Werner Gottschow; their relationship has been described as "a marriage that never worked well, although it never failed entirely."³

Tillich began to oppose Nazism even earlier than did Barth, publishing an essay in 1932 that denounced the Nazi emphasis upon blood and race as "a retreat to paganism and a denial of God and humanity," and called on Protestantism to "stand against the heathenism of the swastika and for the cross."⁴ When Nazi students at Frankfurt attack Jewish students, Tillich demanded that the former be expelled. In 1933 the University of Frankfurt, composed largely of Jewish professors, was declared anti-German and twelve of its faculty were dismissed. Of the twelve, eleven were Jewish, the twelfth was Paul Tillich. Tillich's book was burned along with Jewish writings, he was followed by the Gestapo, and his family and friends urged him to leave the country to avoid arrest. Union Theological Seminary in New York City offered him a teaching position, each of the faculty giving five percent of his/her salary to furnish funds for the first year.⁵ Tillich, at the age of forty-seven, began a new life in the United States.

² Ibid., 27.

³ Ibid., 31.

⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁵ Ibid., 35.

In New York, Tillich taught, wrote, and helped Jewish refugees from Europe establish new lives in America. In 1940 he became a United States citizen. From 1942 to 1944 Tillich broadcast over one hundred talks to the German people through Voice of America, urging them to oppose Hitler. When the defeat of Hitler became inevitable, Tillich began to speak for leniency for the German people and for allowing them to re-integrate peaceably with the rest of Europe. He returned to Germany in 1948 to re-unite with family, to see for himself the devastation of the war, and to teach with compassion at the Universities of Marburg and Frankfurt.

Although invited to return permanently to Germany, Tillich chose to remain in his adopted country. He retired from Union Theological Seminary in 1955 at the age of sixty-nine but immediately joined the faculty of Harvard. He retired from Harvard in 1962 only to become professor at the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. He died in 1965, one of the best known American theologians of his time, leaving behind over five hundred articles and books, including three volumes of Systematic Theology, numerous other books of theology, three books of sermons, and many essays on culture, politics, and art.

2. Tillich once wrote that "Karl Barth starts from above, from the trinity, from the revelation which is given, and then proceeds to man, . . . Whereas, on the other hand, I start with man, not deriving the divine answer from man, but starting with the question which is present in man and to which the divine revelation comes as the answer."⁶ Tillich believed that Barth had performed a valuable service by pointing out the great difference between God and humanity: humans could not of themselves reach up to God nor could human civilization progress to become the Kingdom of God. Barth's position had enabled

⁶ Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), 538.

him to stand firmly for the absolute transcendence of God against liberal Protestantism and German Nazism of his time.

However, Tillich also believed that, while humans might not be able to reach up to God, they could nonetheless ask questions about themselves and God and, without the questions, any answers that might be given would be meaningless. The bumper sticker "Christ is the answer," with the responding "What is the question?" might define, in a rather simplistic way, Tillich's view of Barth's theology. Tillich thought that Barth concentrated so completely upon Christian answers and God's revelation that he neglected to notice that people were asking questions to which his answers and his articulation of God's revelation did not apply.

Tillich set out to do two things: (a) to study the human situation of his time--its politics, art, economics, psychology--in order to understand its deep concerns or questions; and (b) to re-interpret the Christian message in ways that would answer or *correlate with* (the term Tillich used so often) the questions posed by the human condition.⁷

As Tillich worked at the first task, he found the human condition to be full of anxiety:

It is not an exaggeration to say that today man experiences his present situation in terms of disruption, conflict, self-destruction, meaninglessness, and despair in all realms of life. . . . The question arising out of this experience is . . . the question of a reality in which the self-estrangement of our existence is overcome, a reality of reconciliation and reunion, of creativity, meaning, and hope.⁸

Notice that the questions Tillich identified were not questions of personal decision: "Should I take the new job and move the family to Denver? What would God want?" Nor were Tillich's questions those of specific social concern: "Is abortion wrong? What does

⁷ Wilhelm Pauck, "To Be or Not to Be: Tillich on the Meaning of Life," in The Thought of Paul Tillich, eds. James Luther Adams, Wilhelm Pauck, and Roger Lincoln Shinn (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 39.

⁸ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol 1, [paperback ed., 1975] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 49.

the Bible say?" Instead Tillich saw the deep and underlying questions to be questions concerning the condition of human existence itself. As Tillich saw it human existence was a state of separation: separation from God, the source of being; separation of humans from other humans; and separation of humans within themselves. The separation is part of the very condition of existence, but it causes a pervading disease and anxiety. To overcome the tension people often make gods of finite things, as the Germans had done with Hitler, as Americans were doing with capitalism, and as many people did with religious doctrine and morality. Ultimately, these finite gods fail, leaving people more anxious, empty, and guilty than before. Where, then, can humans find reconciliation in the midst of separation, and acceptance in the face of failure and guilt? Where can they find a reunion of their being with the source or ground of being? These are the significant or ultimate questions of human existence.

As Tillich worked at his second task, he became convinced that the church had failed to provide meaningful answers for contemporary questions because traditional Christian language had lost its original power. Christian terminology needed to be revised so as to correlate its message with today's situation. Therefore Tillich spoke of God as the "Ground of Being," of sin as "estrangement," of Jesus Christ as "New Being," of faith as the state of being "ultimately concerned," and of grace as "acceptance." While these words and phrases were difficult for some, others found Tillich's terms refreshing and insightful; and some, who had dismissed Christianity but were asking profound questions about life and its meaning, were drawn to the gospel through Tillich's new language.⁹ It was this latter group--the intellectual skeptics who nonetheless asked questions--that Tillich wanted to address: "My work is with those who ask questions, and for them I am here. For the

⁹ Pauck, 41-42.

others who do not, I have the great problem of tact."¹⁰ Tillich's method of *correlation* was suitable mainly for those asking the deep questions of human existence.

Tillich's Position on Scripture

1. For Tillich the Bible is not authoritative because its words are inerrant and inspired by the Holy Spirit; rather the Bible is authoritative because its stories express the response of those who originally experienced a powerful new reality in Jesus Christ, and because those stories are able to evoke a similar experience in us today. "There is no sacred language which has fallen from a supranatural heaven and been put between the pages of a book," wrote Tillich. "Religious language is ordinary language. . . . It becomes holy for those to whom it expresses their ultimate concern from generation to generation."¹¹ *Expresses* is the key word here. Tillich was not concerned with the facts or lack thereof in the biblical accounts, but rather that the biblical writers had sought to *express* the healing force they had encountered in Jesus Christ.

The biblical writers used word pictures or *symbols* to express their encounter. Tillich wrote that *symbols* are more than *signs*; the latter only point to or mean something, as a red traffic light means "Stop." Symbols, on the other hand, are powerful things which actually participate in the reality of what they seek to express and are therefore able to convey an experience of that reality to others. Tillich used the example of the flag as something which participates in the reality of the country for which it stands, and is also able to convey an experience of that reality to others who are concerned about the reality.¹²

¹⁰ Tillich, as quoted in Pauck, 41.

¹¹ Paul Tillich, "Aspects of a Religious Analysis of Culture," in The Essential Tillich, 107-08.

¹² Paul Tillich, "The Meaning of Symbol," in The Essential Tillich, 41.

You might stop and ask the class members about the experience that the flag conveys to them. You can also use the word picture of "Big Mike and Little Mike," to demonstrate a. how a symbol can both express and recreate an experience and b. how a symbol might answer or correlate with a question of ultimate concern. Suggest that the class keep in mind the experience or story they selected from their own lives, particularly if the experience involves a passage of scripture.

The concern of the children who first experienced the event of Big Mike and Little Mike was probably for security, and their basic question [whether they could express it or not] was, "Will I be left alone? My mother is gone and my dad is away so much. How can I manage alone, for I am only a child?" The event of Big Mike and Little Mike was an answer to the children's question; it was an experience that demonstrated for them, "If ever you are really in trouble, your dad will manage to come to you and take care of you." The event was healing for them, a revelation if you will, and while the full comfort of the event may not have lasted, repeating the story would have re-created the experience of comfort and healing.

The second family of Big Mike was in a different position. The children had a mother who was steady and constant. The children's basic concern may have still been for security, or it might have been for their father's approval and love. The father was still gone much of the time, still involved with other people. The basic question for the children of the second marriage might have been, "Does my father love me as much as he loves all those other people he spends so much time with?" For them the story might have reassured them that they did indeed come first with their father, that they were valued and deeply loved. At any rate, while the questions of the different children (and remember, these questions may have existed whether the children were conscious of them or not) may have been different, the story of Big Mike and Little Mike was a symbol that expressed the experience of healing that came to the first family and recreated a similar experience for the

second family. For still other people, not asking questions of ultimate concern, the story might be interesting but not have any special healing effect at all.

It is symbol in the above sense that Tillich finds in the Bible--expressive word pictures which participate in the original event they describe and which have the power to bring healing and transformation to those whose basic concerns or questions are answered by the symbol. Without the questions, the symbols may mean nothing; but the symbols may correlate with many different questions, depending on the concerns of the times.

In further elaboration on the effect of word pictures or symbols in the Bible, Tillich wrote that symbols are not analogous to photographs but are more like expressionist paintings. Expressionist paintings leave certain things out and emphasize or distort other things, in order to "express what the painter has experienced through his participation in the being of his subject."¹³ In the same way, the word pictures of the Bible ignore certain details and emphasize others, in order to convey the essence of what the writer had experienced. You might illustrate by using the Grünewald Crucifixion or one of the Roualt paintings. Show how distortion, lighting, color are used, quite against any surface naturalism and not for the sake of balance and beauty, but to convey the power and significance of the subject.

2. For Tillich the Bible was authoritative because of its powerful symbols. And Tillich proceeded to interpret the Bible, not as a collection of doctrines or eternal truths, but as a series of connected word pictures that correlated to the needs of human existence. Because human existence is one of estrangement, Tillich pointed to the many biblical symbols which express that estrangement:

It [estrangement] is implied in the symbols of the expulsion from paradise, in the

¹³ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 2, [paperback ed., 1975] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 116.

hostility between man and nature, in the deadly hostility of brother against brother, in the estrangement of nation from nation through the confusion of language, and in the continuous complaints of the prophets against their kings and people who turn to alien gods.¹⁴

While there are many symbols of alienation or estrangement in the Bible, Tillich saw the central biblical symbol to be that of the "New Being in Jesus as the Christ."¹⁵ This word picture of New Being was the one that Tillich used as the criterion for interpreting the whole of scripture. In this Tillich wrote that he was following Luther, who interpreted the Bible through the lens of God's gracious act in Jesus Christ and/or justification through faith.

The symbol of New Being or Jesus as the Christ answers the question of existential estrangement because in Jesus as the Christ, human estrangement was overcome under the very conditions of existence, which by definition involves estrangement. The designation "Jesus as the Christ" joins the name of the human Jesus, an individual who lived a human existence and died a human death, with "as the Christ," because he remained always connected to God and to those around him and was able to mediate that connection to others. Jesus as the Christ is what New Being is--the manifestation of essential being lived under the conditions of existence but not overcome by existence. Jesus as the Christ "represents to those who live under the conditions of existence what man essentially is and therefore ought to be under these conditions."¹⁶

For Tillich, Jesus' teachings, deeds, and suffering were expressions of his New Being but not what made him the New Being.¹⁷ Tillich thought that these expressions of

¹⁴ Ibid., 2:45.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1:50.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2:93.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2:121-25.

New Being had frequently been emphasized too strongly by the church, making Jesus into a moral teacher or a miracle worker or an example to follow. Those emphases distorted the symbol of Jesus as the Christ. Those emphases also failed to correlate with existential need; the human condition did not need more moral teachers or miracle workers or examples; the world needed New Being, the ability to live--if only sporadically--within estranged existence while remaining at one with the Ground of Being. This New Being is what Jesus as the Christ was and this New Being is what Jesus as the Christ can mediate to us.

Two major symbols express New Being: the "Cross of Christ" is the symbol that expresses submission to existence, while the "Resurrection of Christ" is the symbol that expresses triumph over existence. The two symbols are interdependent and must always be used together when speaking of New Being.¹⁸ Without submission to existence, Christ would have remained above it, unable to bring healing to us. Without conquest of existence, Jesus would have remained a good man but would not have been the Christ. Without both the "Cross of Christ" and the "Resurrection of Christ," there could be no New Being in the world.

Tillich thought that the major symbols of the Cross and of Resurrection were pointed to by other symbols or word pictures in the Bible. The Cross is anticipated in the stories of the simple birth in Bethlehem, in the misunderstanding of the disciples, in the antagonism of the religious authorities, and in the scene in Gethsemane. All these stories, says Tillich, show "the subjection of him who is the bearer of the New Being to the destructive structures of the old being."¹⁹ The Resurrection is pointed to by the Prologue to the Gospel of John, by the miracle stories, and by the word picture of the Transfiguration.

¹⁸ Tillich, Systematic Theology, 2:152.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2:159.

Together, these various symbols expressed the new reality that the disciples experienced in Jesus Christ, and the symbols have the power to mediate New Being to us as well.

Tillich was inclined (as were Luther and Schleiermacher) to ignore the parts of the Bible which did not offer symbols or word pictures that expressed either the human condition or New Being or some other experience that spoke to questions of ultimate concern.

A Return to Tillich's Sermon

1. Tillich asserted that the Bible is authoritative because its word pictures or symbols are able to express the healing of the original healing event of New Being or Jesus as the Christ. Ask the class members if they agree with that position. Ask them if there are any word pictures in the Bible that have the power to bring healing or some semblance of New Being to them. (Let them come up with their own experiences with the symbols of the Bible, but if they have trouble getting started, suggest Jacob's night wrestling with the angel or Psalm 23 or the symbol of "The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us.") Is Tillich correct in thinking that these biblical symbols are rendered as expressionist paintings rather than as photographs or idealized portraits? Have the class give evidence for their answers.

2. While Tillich emphasized the power of biblical word pictures, does the sermon we are looking at use biblical symbols or word pictures? Tillich builds upon Paul's term, "new creation," but does he use specific stories from the Bible or Paul's explanation of the term? (No, as I see it. I do not think that Paul describes or uses "new creation" often enough for it to be a symbol, in the way Tillich uses it. Therefore Tillich's symbol of New Being in this particular sermon, although based upon a term in scripture, is not created from a biblical understanding of that term. It is based upon other biblical symbols and Tillich's own observations of the human condition. Nonetheless, in paragraph 4 Tillich says, "We want only to communicate to you an experience we have had that here and there

in the world and now and then in ourselves is a New Creation, usually hidden, but sometimes manifest, and certainly manifest in Jesus who is called the Christ." For me, that sentence, not based upon a biblical story or by referral to Paul's writings, but upon Tillich's definition of what New Being is and is not, expressed an experience that I have had and lost and then had again. It was therefore healing for me.

It is the same when Tillich describes the human condition of hostility in paragraph 8; he does not build upon a biblical symbol but describes it according to his own reflections--perhaps upon biblical symbols but more directly upon observation of the human situation.)

3. Ask the class members if they agree with Tillich's insistence upon correlation, that the Christian message must be expressed so as to answer questions of human existence today? The following is a statement which describes Barth's opposition to Tillich; ask the class members whether they relate more to Barth or to Tillich:

Karl Barth . . . insisted that revelation does not answer questions; it poses them. . . . [Barth thought that] the question/answer scheme is inherently misleading. Revelation brings unheard-of news which totally changes the way everything looks, so that what had looked like important questions now appear relatively trivial or deceptive.²⁰

Is there a way to agree with both Tillich and Barth? (The existential questions are God-given, as Tillich insisted, because we are part of the Ground of Being even though estranged from it. On the other hand, revelation can, as Barth believed, create new questions or, rather, can show us where our questions are not really of ultimate concern.)

4. Tillich defended Schleiermacher at a time when the latter had fallen into disrepute.²¹ Ask the class members if they can see the affinities between the two theologians. (Both begin with the human situation--a feeling of ultimate dependence in

²⁰ David H. Kelsey, "Paul Tillich," in The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century, ed. David Ford, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 100.

²¹ Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, 386-410.

Schleiermacher, questions of ultimate concern in Tillich. Both understand the importance of Jesus Christ to be in his ability to transform lives--create God consciousness for Schleiermacher, mediate New Being for Tillich. Both have a literary approach to scripture--determining meaning by examining parts in relationship to the whole for Schleiermacher, examining and clarifying symbols for Tillich.)

5. Ask the class members where they think Tillich would stand in relationship to Warfield? You might use the following quotation from Tillich:

All idolatry is nothing else than the absolutizing of symbols of the Holy, and making them identical with the Holy itself. . . . In all sacramental activities of religion, in all holy objects, holy books, holy doctrines, holy rites, you find this danger which we will call 'demonization.' They become demonic at the moment in which they become elevated to the unconditional and ultimate character of the Holy itself.²²

6. At this point go back to the words or phrases that were new for class members and put on the chalk board. Ask if the discussion of Tillich made those words/phrases any clearer? Explain any terms the class still does not understand.

7. Go through the other questions on the handout. Pay close attention to the class' answers to question 4. Does the class see the concerns of human existence in the same way or are there other questions of ultimate concern being asked?

8. Ask if there are other things that need to be discussed.

Summary

Ask the class what impressed them most about Tillich. Ask the class to define Tillich's position on biblical authority. Ask the class to describe the way Tillich tended to interpret scripture. Ask them where Tillich might stand in relation to questions 1 and 10 of the questionnaire. Ask if any had changed their minds in response to question 2 on the Handout 7a, about which theologian seems most similar to Tillich?

²² Paul Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language," in The Essential Tillich, 50-51.

Final Details and Closing Prayer

Tell the class that there is no new homework! They should look over the sermons they have read and decide upon the one/s they like best. Next week they will spend time discussing their favorite theologian, going over the questionnaires they filled out at the first class, and summarizing the helpfulness of the course for them in clarifying their ideas about biblical authority and interpretation. They will also look at some contemporary social issues and try to determine how people coming at that issue from different positions on biblical authority and interpretation might react.

Closing Prayer: O God of all, in whom we live and move and have our being, help us not to get so caught up in our particular religions that we fail to be truly religious. Create in us such longing for meaning and purpose that we dare to look honestly at our condition as humans. Then give us meaningful symbols that will bring reconciliation--even if it be fleeting--to our situations. Enable us to continue to live with hope in our broken world. We pray in the name of the one who brings New Being. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Final Lesson

Notes to the Teacher

1. Prepare and arrange around the room six different pieces of newsprint, each with one of the following pieces of information. Alternately, you can prepare a handout containing the information, leaving space in the left margin for people to write:

(a) The authority of the Bible lies in the fact that it is the record of the gracious work of God in Jesus Christ; interpretation is done with that gracious work as the criterion.

(b) The authority of the Bible comes from the fact that its words are the very words of God; interpretation consists of examining those words to find eternal truths.

(c) The authority of the Bible consists of the symbols which express and recreate the experience of New Being; interpretation is done by correlating biblical symbols with existential questions.

(d) The authority of the Bible lies in the fact that every detail is inspired; interpretation consists of using allegory to discover the spiritual truths underlying the surface meaning.

(e) The authority of the Bible lies in its witness to the Word of God revealed; interpretation consists of noting patterns and broad themes that point to God's revelation of God's self.

(f) The authority of the Bible lies in its ability to create relationship with the Redeemer and thereby transform lives; interpretation is achieved by knowing language, the writer, and how to examine parts of a composition.

2. You will also be using the questionnaire from the Beginning Lesson, so have a few extras on hand for those who have forgotten to bring their own.

3. The lesson is written so as to consider how various approaches to scripture might respond to the issue of women in ordained ministry. You should probably think through other issues and be prepared to discuss them should the class want to do so.

Lesson Overview

Objective:

The class members will be able to identify each theologian according to the above brief statements regarding biblical authority and interpretation. They will also be able to state where they stand themselves. They will discuss how understanding scripture's authority in the above ways and/or interpreting scripture in the above ways might possibly play out in responding to a social issue currently in debate in church circles.

Lesson Plan in Outline:

- A. Opening Prayer.
- B. Review of the Theologians.
- C. Class Members Determination of Their Positions.
- D. Discussion of a Social Issue.
- E. Course Evaluation and Closing Prayer.

Lesson Content

Prayer

Open with sentence prayers of thanksgiving.

Review of the Theologians

1. Ask the class to name the theologian that best represents the brief authority/interpretation position written on the six pieces of newsprint. As the class identifies the positions, write in the theologians' names on the proper piece of newsprint. Because the positions are very brief, ask the class to add what they think might make the position more specific. Which theologians seem to be similar to each other in either the area of authority or interpretation?

2. As we studied each theologian, we made a decision about where that thinker might stand in relationship to question 1 of the questionnaire handed out in the beginning lesson. Can the class do that again now? As the class calls out the numbers 1 through 5, according to available positions, put those position numbers on the newsprint by each of the theologians names. Which theologians fit most comfortably with the question on inspiration? Which theologians would probably add comments to clarify their positions?

3. In the beginning lesson we talked about the range of positions regarding the inspiration of the Bible as being conservative, moderate, liberal. Would class members be able to label the theologians we have studied and tell why they would apply the term conservative-moderate-liberal to the particular thinker? (There may be differences of opinion here; let them play a while.) Put an appropriate label or perhaps labels, if there is disagreement, on the newsprint with each theologian.

The terms conservative-moderate-liberal, when applied to biblical authority, tend to indicate "the degree" of authority. Below is a quotation that questions the usefulness of applying those labels to the issue of biblical authority:

The continued use of such essentially political terms embodies some deep mistakes. It is dangerous to continue to think that the only question to ask about the authority of scripture is "how much authority?" . . . I will argue that there are different ways of thinking about the Bible as authoritative that we cannot rank on a single scale--not less authority or more, but just different, functioning as authority in different ways.¹

All our theologians, even ones the class may have labeled "very liberal," saw themselves as basing their work upon the Bible. Does the class see with Placher that the difference in the men does not have as much to do with "how much authority does scripture have," as with "what is it about scripture that makes it authoritative?" Does the class see that question 1

¹ William C. Placher, "The Nature of Biblical Authority: Issues and Models from Recent Theology," in Conservative, Moderate, Liberal: The Biblical Authority Debate, ed. Charles R. Blaisdell (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1990), 2.

about inspiration is inadequate if taken alone as a measure of authority? What sort of question should be added to the questionnaire? (Perhaps the one above or "How does scripture become authoritative for you?" or "What is it in scripture that has the power to influence you?" These questions and their many possible answers may help to demonstrate the complexity of the issue of biblical authority.)

4. Have the class look at question 10 on the Presbyterian questionnaire. What would Tillich say must be added to that list? (a close look at human existence and a careful analysis of biblical symbols) Barth? (a study of re-occurring patterns and themes) Schleiermacher? (a study of general and specific language and a study of the arrangement of material). Have members of the class considered any of these added elements when interpreting scripture? How?

5. Ask if there are questions or comments about any of the theologians.

Class Members Determination of Their Positions

1. Ask the class members which sermon/s they preferred; make a record of the responses on a separate piece of newsprint. Then ask the participants which theologians they were most comfortable with in regard to biblical authority and authority; tell them that it is possible to side with one thinker on authority, with another on interpretation; it is also possible to combine positions or be "on the fence" about things. Tally the responses on newsprint with the sermon favorites so that the class can get an overview. Do people find they liked the sermon of one theologian but possibly the theological position of another; what might this say about the theologian or about themselves?

2. Ask them to look again at question 2 on the questionnaire, about whether positions regarding the inspiration of scripture had changed over the years. Can their class members say if their positions regarding the authority and interpretation of scripture has changed? Let them talk if they need to.

Discussion of a Social Issue

1. Go to question 5 on the Presbyterian questionnaire. Point out that the Bible is on the list of answers, as are other biblically-related resources. Can the class see that a person's approach to the Bible might be as important as his/her considering it "very important" as a source of guidance. Tell the class that we are not going to speculate about what any of our theologians might think about today's social issues. But we will take an issue and see if we can determine how a particular attitude towards biblical authority and/or a particular interpretation strategy might approach the issue. The exercise is not to find the "right" position on the issue but to try to understand why and how different competent scholars and church members come up with different positions on the various issues. The questions of "how does scripture function as an authority for me?" and "how do I figure out what the Bible means?" are frequently as crucial to what one decides about a particular social issue as is one's classification as conservative-moderate-liberal.

2. Let the group choose an issue--perhaps abortion; the ordination of gays and lesbians; in the deep south there is still much controversy about women pastors. For purposes of an example for this lesson, let us use the latter issue, of whether or not women should be ordained to pastor churches.

3. Have the class select one of the authority/interpretation positions from those on the newsprint around the room. Then have them discuss how holding those positions might influence how one approached the chosen social issue. For example, position (a) above, which sees both the Bible's authority and its interpretative criterion to be God's gracious acts in Jesus Christ, might actually dismiss some of the specific scriptural rules and regulations having to do with women, if it were determined that the rules were not in accordance with God's gracious acts in Jesus Christ; scripture (as gospel) would be used to interpret scripture.

On the other hand, positions (b) and (d) above, which see every word of scripture as authoritative would have to consider carefully the Corinthians and Timothy exhortations against women speaking in assembly; position (b) would probably consider the Corinthians and Timothy texts to be eternal truths pronounced by God himself, while position (d) would have the freedom to allegorize them away (though the latter would probably stick close to church tradition in the allegorizing).

Position (e), which interprets patterns and reoccurring themes in scripture, might bring up the elected/rejected pattern which is finally reconciled in the crucified/resurrected Christ and then pronounce the once rejected women now elected!! Once the group begins to work with the positions, they will come up with ideas of their own. Again, the exercise is not meant to come to a definitive answer on the issue of women in ordained ministry but to demonstrate that decisions on such matters can be influenced by one's positions both on biblical authority and biblical interpretation.

(The above will probably be the hardest part of the class and it may not work at all.)

4. After the class has played with the social issue a while, ask the participants if they themselves have been aware of their beliefs about biblical authority and interpretation as they have made decisions about social issues. Is there any relationship or do they perhaps make decisions about social issues on gut reaction without any real consideration of their approach to the Bible?

Course Evaluation and Final Prayer

When the class has finished discussing the social issue, ask each one to state what was most helpful about the course. Then ask what could have been improved or added.

Close either (1) by singing together the hymn "O Word of God Incarnate" and offering a prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance as we seek to encounter the Incarnate Word in the pages of scripture, or (2) by reading Hebrews 12:1 and then praying the following:

Almighty God, you have surrounded us with a great cloud of witnesses. Grant that we, encouraged by the good example of your servants--Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, Benjamin Warfield, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Luther, and Pope Gregory I--may persevere in running the race that is set before us, until at last we may with them attain to your eternal joy; through Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.²

² Adapted from the Episcopal Church, The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1979), 250.

Handout 1a

Questionnaire Regarding Scripture¹

1.a. Please share your views on the Divine inspiration of Scripture by checking the one statement below which is closest to your own belief about this issue. If you wish to clarify your position, please use the space provided for comments.

- _____ 1. The Bible, though written by individuals, has been so controlled by the Holy Spirit that it is without error in all it teaches in matters of science and history as well as in matters of theology and ethics.
- _____ 2. The Bible, though written by individuals and reflecting their personalities, has been so controlled by the Holy Spirit that it is trustworthy in all it teaches in matters of theology and ethics, but not necessarily in matters of science and history.
- _____ 3. All of the Bible is both the inspired Word of God and at the same time a thoroughly human document.
- _____ 4. Portions of the Bible, including some of its theological and ethical positions, may not be the inspired Word of God.
- _____ 5. The Bible is simply a record of the moral and religious experiences of Hebrews and Christians.

b. Comments regarding the Divine inspiration of the Bible: _____

2. Do you find that your own beliefs about the Divine inspiration of the Bible have changed through the years? Circle Yes or No.

If "yes," which of the views described in 1.a. above best represents your previous belief?

Circle the number corresponding to 1 through 5 above: 1 2 3 4 5

3. Which of the following statements best reflects your view of the Bible as a guide for contemporary Christian living? Check only one response.

- _____ a. The Bible contains specific answers to every possible question of contemporary life.
- _____ b. The Bible contains insights which provide general guidance for all of the problems of contemporary life.
- _____

¹ United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, "January, 1980, Questionnaire," (New York: Presbyterian Panel, 1980). The format of the original questionnaire has been changed, some questions reworded, and two question omitted.

_____ c. There are problems of contemporary life which cannot be answered by the Bible.

4. How do you think that the account of creation, recorded in Genesis, can best be understood? Check the one statement which most closely reflects your opinion.

_____ a. The biblical account of creation accurately records each detail of the origin of the universe.

_____ b. The biblical account of creation is a theological and not necessarily a scientific account of the origin of the universe.

_____ c. The biblical account of creation is a figurative representation of the evolutionary process.

_____ d. The biblical account of creation is a fictional account of the origin of the universe.

_____ e. I am not sure how the biblical account of creation should be interpreted.

5. In making decisions on contemporary social issues, Christians look to a number of sources for information and guidance. Please indicate the degree of importance you actually attach to each of the following resources as a source of guidance on such issues. Rate the items from 1 (very important) to 4 (not important). Use N/O for "no opinion."

_____ a. the Bible

_____ b. biblical commentaries and interpretations

_____ c. denominational policy statements

_____ d. the Book of Confessions

_____ e. writings of theologians

_____ f. your minister(s) and/or other ministers

_____ g. members of your congregation and/or friends who are Christians

_____ h. other friends or co-workers

_____ i. family members

_____ j. the news media

_____ k. vocational/professional organizations

_____ l. personal insights and/or experiences

6. Once you have arrived at a decision with regard to a contemporary social issue, you may be confronted by another Christian who holds a different point of view. How likely would you be to respond in each of the following ways? Rate each of the possible responses from 1 (very likely) to 4 (very unlikely).

- _____ a. I would quote relevant Bible passages which support my point of view.
- _____ b. I would explain my position in terms of the insights gained from the Bible.
- _____ c. I would make the person aware of the denomination's position on the issue.
- _____ d. I would encourage the person to read materials which support my position.
- _____ e. I would attempt to enter into dialogue in which we could examine both sides of the issue.
- _____ f. I would pray for the person.
- _____ g. I would avoid discussing such issues with that person in the future.

7. To what extent do each of the statements below reflect your own reaction when you encounter several passages of the Bible which seem to contradict one another? Label the action from 1 (to a great extent) to 4 (not at all). You may also write in NS (not sure).

- _____ a. I accept the passage which supports my point of view on the issue.
- _____ b. I accept the passage which seems to describe the issue most clearly.
- _____ c. I discuss the passages with my pastor.
- _____ d. I avoid using those particular passages.
- _____ e. I pray for guidance.
- _____ f. I assume that such conflicts reflect only my own lack of understanding.
- _____ g. I feel that all of life is full of contradictions and that the Bible reflects this condition.
- _____ h. I regard this as an incentive for further study.

8. How often do you currently engage in each of the following practices? Please mark each activity as follows: daily, st/w (several times a week), weekly, st/m (several times a month), st/y (several times a year), oy (once a year or less), never.

- _____ a. I read or study the Bible as part of a group or class devoted specifically to Bible study.
- _____ b. I read or study the Bible as part of a church group activity other than a Bible study group (e.g., class on social issues, preparing devotions, etc.)

- _____ c. I read or study the Bible at home with member(s) of my family.
- _____ d. I read or study the Bible on my own.
- _____ e. I read or study biblically focused materials on my own.

9. Please indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement with each of the following general statements, 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = disagree; and 4 = strongly disagree. You may also write in N/O for "no opinion."

- _____ a. Present cultural views of personal freedom work against the biblical understanding of obedience.
- _____ b. Accepting diversity within our denomination (i.e., making room for persons holding a variety of views on doctrinal issues) weakens the authority of the Scriptures.
- _____ c. The Bible cannot be understood without the help of interpretative materials.
- _____ d. The widely differing ways the Old and New Testaments are accepted, interpreted and applied are the most prevalent causes of conflict in our denomination today.
- _____ e. Additional books should be added to the Bible in our own day.

10. Christians have different opinions regarding several methods of studying the Bible. Please indicate your opinions regarding the appropriateness of each of the methods of Bible study listed below. 1 = very appropriate; 2 = somewhat appropriate; 3 = not appropriate. You may also write in N/O for "no opinion."

- _____ a. a study of the dating and authorship of biblical materials
- _____ b. a study of the forms in which biblical materials circulated before being incorporated into written documents
- _____ c. a study of cultural conditions at the time the biblical materials were written.
- _____ d. a study of ways in which the biblical writers edited the materials they received, in order to speak to the needs of people in their own day.
- _____ e. a comparison of various translations of the Bible
- _____ f. an openness to the inner leading of the Holy Spirit

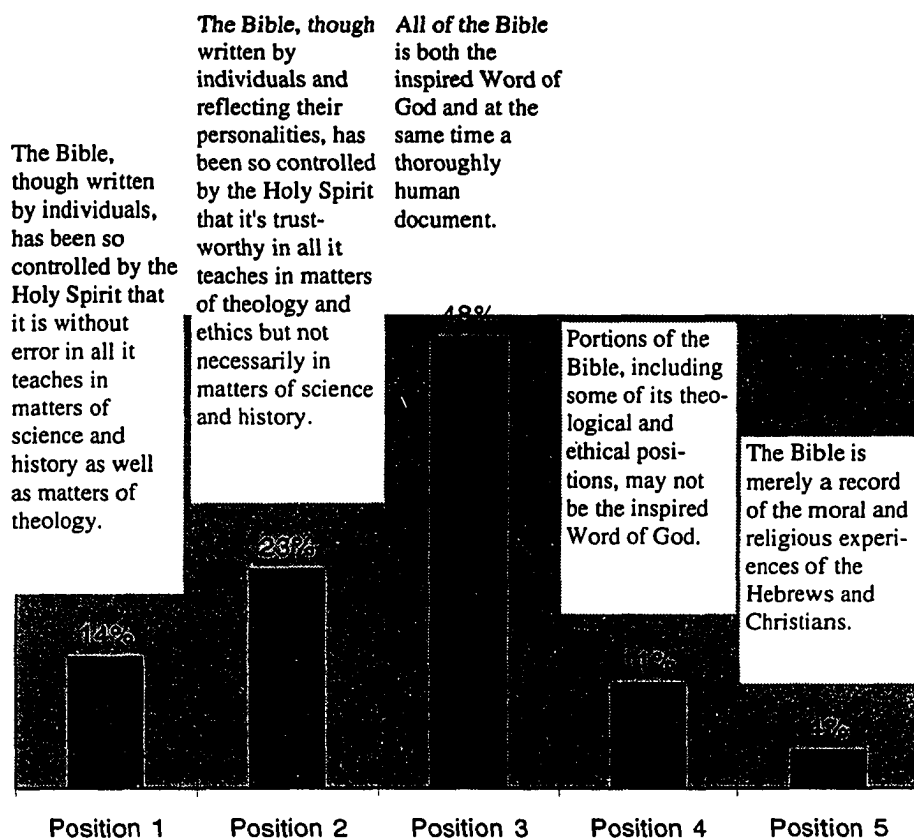
Any other thoughts or comments? Continue on the back of this page if necessary.

Handout 1b

Presbyterian Panel Findings¹

The questionnaire sent out by the Presbyterian Panel was completed by 2,990 persons: 1,114 members-at large, 658 elders, 722 pastors, and 496 clergy in specialized ministry. The following findings sometimes give responses according to category of respondents.

1. The question about the divine inspiration of the Bible is summarized in the table below.



¹ This information is taken from United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, "United Presbyterian Views on the Nature of Biblical Authority and the Use of Scripture." (New York: Presbyterian Panel, 1980).

Some observations:

While position 3 dominated in all categories of respondents (members-at-large, elders, pastors, and clergy in specialized ministry), the percentage for the most conservative position were 17% for members-at-large, 18% for elders, and 11% for pastors, and only 5% for clergy in specialized ministry. This demonstrates that pastors are generally more liberal than are their congregations and that clergy working outside a parish are more liberal still.

Positions 1 and 2 were supported by over twice as many persons as positions 4 and 5 (37 percent to 15 percent), demonstrating that Presbyterians who do not hold to a perfect balance of human and divine elements in scripture, lean toward the divine.

2. Approximately one-half of the members, elders and pastors, and almost two-thirds of the clergy in specialized ministries, report that their beliefs about the divine inspiration of the Bible have changed through the years. Most report having previously held either a highly authoritarian or a moderately authoritarian belief.

3. When asked about their view of the Bible as a guide for contemporary Christian living, more than three-fourths of the respondents in each group checked position b: "The Bible contains insights which provide general guidance for all of the problems of contemporary life." One in ten lay respondents checked position a: "The Bible contains specific answers to every possible question of contemporary life."

4. More respondents in all four groups held with position b: "The biblical account of creation recorded in Genesis is a theological and not necessarily a scientific account of the origin of the universe." But members and elders were more likely than clergy to adopt the most literal interpretation or to hold position c: "The biblical account of creation is a figurative representation of the evolutionary process." Members and elders are also more likely than clergy to say that they are not sure - position e.

5. In making decisions on contemporary social issues, panelists consistently rated a. and l. (the Bible and personal insights) as "1 - very important." Panelists also tended to rate j. and k. (the news media and vocational/professional organizations) as being "4 - not important" as sources of guidance.

6. When asked to rate the likelihood of several possible responses they might make if they are confronted by a Christian who holds a different point of view, most respondents said "very likely" to statement b: "I would explain my position in terms of the insights gained from the Bible," or to statement e: "I would attempt to enter into dialogue in which we could examine both sides of the issue."

Handout 2a

Sermon of Pope Gregory I
"Homily 13"¹

Notes and Instructions:

The following sermon was preached in Rome to the general population, probably some time before 600 C.E. The scripture as well as the sermon is from Forty Gospel Homilies, and Hurst's pattern of putting all scripture quotations in italics has been maintained. Hurst's footnotes have been left out. The paragraphs of the sermon have been numbered so that the class can refer quickly to passages in group discussion.

Read the scripture and Gregory's sermon out loud. There are questions to answer at the end of the sermon.

Then he took the twelve and said to them: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all the things that have been written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered to the peoples and shall be mocked and treated spitefully and spat on. And they will flog him and put him to death, and the third day he shall rise again." But they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, nor did they know the things which were spoken. And it came to pass that as he drew near to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the wayside, begging. And hearing the crowd pass, he asked what it meant. And they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing. And he cried, saying, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." And the people ahead rebuked him, that he should be silent, but he cried out even more: "Son of David, have mercy on me." But Jesus stopped and ordered him to be brought to him. And when he had come near he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And he said,

¹ Pope Gregory I, "Homily 13," in Forty Gospel Homilies, trans. David Hurst (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 94-100. Used by permission.

"Lord, that I may see." And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight, your faith has saved you." At once he saw and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

1. Our Redeemer foresaw that the hearts of his disciples would be greatly disturbed by his passion. He foretold to them far ahead both the agony of his passion and the glory of his resurrection. Then when they beheld him dying, as had been foretold, they would not doubt that he was also to rise again. But since the disciples, still unspiritual as they were, were entirely unable to grasp the words of the mystery, there was need of a miracle. A blind man received the light before their eyes so that a heavenly deed might strengthen the faith of those who failed to grasp the words of the heavenly mystery.

2. We must understand the miracles of our Lord and Saviour, dearly beloved, so as to believe that they have been truly done, and that their meaning still signifies something to us. His works show one thing by their power, and speak to us another by their mystery. We do not know the historical identity of the blind man, but we know whom he mystically denotes. The blind man is the human race. In our first parents it was driven from the joys of paradise, and ignorant of the brightness of the divine light, it suffered the darkness of its condemnation. But yet it is enlightened by the presence of its Redeemer, to see already the joys of inward light by desire, and to direct the footsteps of its good works in the way of life.

3. We must note that the blind man was enlightened while Jesus is said to be drawing near Jericho. Jericho is interpreted "moon." In sacred scripture the moon symbolizes the weakness of our body, since as it wanes in its monthly changes it depicts the weakness of our mortal nature. The blind man came to the light when our Creator drew near Jericho, because when a divine person undertook the weakness of body the human race recovered the light that it had lost. God suffered as a human being, and humans are raised up to divinity.

4. The blind man is rightly described as sitting at the wayside and as begging. Truth himself told us: *I am the way*. Any one ignorant of the brightness of eternal light is blind. If he already believes in his Redeemer he is sitting at the wayside. If he already believes but only pretends to ask for eternal light, if he refrains from praying, he is indeed a blind man sitting at the wayside, . . . If he believes, and knows the blindness of his heart, if he begs to receive the light of truth, he is sitting at the wayside begging. If anyone recognizes the darkness of his blindness, if anyone understands that the light of truth is wanting in him, let him cry from the bottom of his heart, let him cry also with his whole mind, let him say: *"Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!"*

5. But let us hear what happened when the blind man was crying out: *And the people ahead rebuked him, that he should be silent*. What is meant by "the people ahead" as Jesus comes if not the crowds of bodily desires and the uproar caused by our vices? Before Jesus comes into our hearts they disturb our thoughts by tempting us, and they thoroughly muddle the words in our hearts as we pray. We often wish to be converted to the Lord when we have committed some wrong. When we try to pray earnestly against the wrongs we have committed, images of our sins come into our hearts. They obscure our inner vision, they disturb our minds and overwhelm the sound of our petition. *And so the people ahead rebuked him, that he should be silent*, because before Jesus comes into our hearts the evils we have done rise up in our thoughts as images, and they throw us into confusion in the very act of praying.

6. But let us hear what the blind man, still unenlightened, did. *But he cried out all the more: "Son of David, have mercy on me."* See how the one the crowd told to be silent cried out all the more! In proportion to the tumult of our unspiritual thoughts must be our eagerness to persist in prayer. The crowd opposes our crying out, since frequently we endure the images of our sins even in prayer. But it is surely necessary that the more harshly our heart's voice is repressed, the more firmly it must persist to overcome the

uproar of forbidden thoughts and break in on our Lord's gracious ears by its intrepid perseverance. I believe that everyone observes what I am saying in himself, and herself. When we turn our minds from this world to God, when we are converted to the work of prayer, what we once enjoyed doing we later endure in our prayer as demanding and burdensome. Holy desire only with difficulty banishes the recollection of them from our hearts; the sorrows of repentance scarcely overcome their images.

7. But when we persist ardently in our prayer, we fix Jesus to our hearts as he passes by. Hence: *But Jesus stopped and ordered him to be brought to him.* You see how one who was passing by stopped. While we are still suffering the crowds of images in our prayer, we realize that Jesus is in some sense passing by; but when we persist ardently in prayer, Jesus stops. He revives the light, because God is fixed to our hearts, and the light we have lost is restored.

8. But here the Lord is suggesting something else to us, which we can profitably understand of his humanity and divinity. Jesus heard the blind man crying out as he was passing by, but standing still he manifested the miracle of enlightenment. Passing by is characteristic of his humanity, standing still his divinity. Through his humanity he was able to be born, to grow up, to die, to rise, to go from place to place. Since there is no possibility of change in his divinity, and the possibility of being changed is what is meant by "passing by," this "passing by" is characteristic of his humanity and not of his divinity. It pertains to his divinity to stand always still, since he is present everywhere, and neither comes nor goes by motion. The Lord heard the blind man crying out when he was passing by, but stood still to enlighten him, because it was in his humanity that he had pitied the words of our blindness and showed us mercy, but by the power of his divinity that he poured into us the light of his grace.

9. We must now look at what he said to the blind man as he came near: "*What do you want me to do for you?*" Was one who could restore light ignorant of what the blind man

wanted? But he wants to be asked for what he already knows; we shall request and he will grant. He counsels us to be untiring in our prayers, and yet he says: *For your Father knows what you need before you request it of him.* And so he questions that we may ask him, he questions to rouse our hearts to prayer.

10. The blind man immediately said: *"Lord, that I may see."* The blind man does not ask the Lord for gold, but for light. He sets little store by asking anything but light, because though he can have anything at all, without light he is unable to see what he has. Let us imitate him, dearly beloved. We have heard that he was saved in both body and mind. Let us not ask the Lord for deceptive riches, or earthly gifts, or passing honors, but for light. And let us not ask for light shut up in one place, or limited by time, or ending with the coming of night. The beasts behold such light just as we do. Let us ask for the light which we can see with angels alone, light without beginning or end.

11. The way to this light is faith. Hence Jesus immediately says to the blind man who is to be enlightened: *"Look up, your faith has saved you."*

12. Our unspiritual mind says in reply to this: "How can I ask for spiritual light which I am unable to see? How can I be certain that it exists if it does not shine for my bodily eyes?" Everyone can make a brief reply to this thought: There are things we understand by reflecting on them not through the body but through the soul. No one sees his soul, and yet we do not doubt that we have a soul we do not see. Our visible body is ruled by an invisible soul. If what is invisible be taken away, what was visible and appeared to be lasting immediately perishes. We live in this visible life on account of an invisible substance. Can we doubt that an invisible life exists?

13. But let us hear what happened to the request of the blind man, and what he himself did. *At once he saw, and he followed him.* That person sees and follows who knows what is good and behaves accordingly; that one sees but does not follow who knows what is good but refuses to do it. Dearly beloved, if we acknowledge that we are blind persons

on pilgrimage now, if we sit at the wayside by believing in the mystery of our Redeemer, if we ask light from our Creator by begging earnestly for it every day, if we have now been enlightened after our blindness by seeing the light by our understanding, then let us follow by our deeds the Jesus we behold with our hearts. Let us consider where he is walking, and let us follow his footsteps by imitating him. The person who imitates Jesus follows him. Thus he says: *Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.* Following means imitating. And again he gives us consent, saying, *If anyone serves me, let him follow me.*

14. Let us then consider where he is walking, that we may be worthy to follow him. Look how although he is Lord and creator of the angels, when he was to take on himself our nature, which he created, he entered the Virgin's womb. Even then he did not will to be born in this world among the rich, but he chose for himself poor parents. There was no lamb to offer for him, but his mother found two turtledoves and two young pigeons for the sacrifice. He refused to prosper in this world; he endured reproaches and mockery, he bore up under spitting, scourging, blows, a crown of thorns and a cross. Because we had fallen away from inner joy by our delight in material things, he showed with what bitterness we must return to it.

15. Accordingly, what must we humans not suffer on our own behalf, if God bore so much for us? If there is a person who believes in Christ, but who still pursues the gains of avarice, who is exalted by pride in honors, who burns with the flames of envy, who defiles himself with unclean desires, who eagerly desires to succeed in the things of the world, that one is refusing to follow Jesus in whom he has believed. If there is anyone to whom his Leader has shown the way of bitterness, who longs for joy and amusement, that one is walking a different route. Let us then call up before our eyes the sins we have committed, let us consider how fearful a judge will punish them, let us dispose our hearts to sorrow, let us embitter our lives for a time with repentance: then we shall not feel eternal bitterness in punishment. We are being led to eternal joys by way of weeping, as Truth promises us:

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. And the same Truth bears witness that through joy we come to weeping: *Woe to you who now laugh, for you will mourn and weep.* If we are seeking joy when we arrive at the time of recompense, then let us hold on to the bitterness of repentance on our way there. So it will come about that not only will our lives move toward God, but our way of life here and now will arouse others to the praise of God: *And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.*

Jot down brief answers to the questions below and be prepared to share them with the group during the next class.

1. Does the sermon speak to you and how?
2. What seems different to you in the way Gregory interprets the scripture passage?
3. How might you argue with the sermon?
4. What, in your opinion, is Gregory's most helpful insight regarding this scripture?

Handout 2b

Excerpts from "Homily 24" of Pope Gregory I¹

Again the sermon paragraphs are numbered for easy referral during discussion.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias in this way: Simon Peter and Thomas called the Twin and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and another two of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I'm going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got on a ship immediately. And that night they caught nothing. But when morning came, Jesus stood on the shore. But the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you no food?" They replied, No. And he said to them, "Cast your net on right side of the boat and you will find some fishes." They cast and were not able to draw in the net for all the fish. Then that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his fisherman's coat, for he was naked, and threw himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a small ship, for they were not far from shore, perhaps two hundred cubits, dragging the net with the fish in it. As soon as they had come ashore, they saw a fire of coals there and fish laid on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have caught." Simon Peter got up and brought the net to land full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three, and although there were so many the net was not broken.

3. . . . We read twice in the holy Gospel that the Lord ordered that nets be let down for fishing, before his passion, [Luke 5:4-6] and after his resurrection. Before our

¹ Pope Gregory I, "Homily 24," in Forty Gospel Homilies, 179-86. Used by permission.

Redeemer suffered and rose, he ordered the net let down for fishing, but he didn't say whether it was to be cast on the right side or the left. Appearing to his disciples after his resurrection, he ordered that the net be let down on the right side. In the earlier catch so many fish were taken that the nets were torn, but in the later even though many fish were taken, the nets were not torn. Everyone knows that the good are designated by the right side and the wicked on the left, and so, in the earlier catch in which no particular order was given as to the side where the net should be cast, the Church of the present time has signified. The Church takes the good along with the wicked. It does not choose those it brings in, because it is ignorant of those whom it can choose. The later catch, after the Lord's resurrection, takes place only on the right side, since only the Church of the elect, which will possess nothing of the works of the left side, will come to see the glory of his brightness. In the earlier catch the net was broken on account of the great number of fish, because a large number of the wicked now enters to confession [sic] the faith with the elect, and they tear the Church itself apart with their heresies. In the later catch many large fish are caught, and the net is untorn, because the holy Church of the elect remains in the uninterrupted peace of its creator and no dissension tears it apart.

4. After catching such large fish, *Simon Peter got up and brought the net to the land*. I believe that you, dear listeners, now perceive why it was Peter who brought the net to land. Our holy Church had been entrusted to him; it was to him individually that it was said: *Simon, son of John, do you love me? Feed my sheep*. What was afterwards disclosed to him in words was now indicated to him by an action. Because the Church's preacher was to part us from the waves of this world, it was surely necessary that Peter bring the net full of fish to land. He dragged the fish to the firm ground of the shore, because by his preaching he revealed to the faithful the stability of our eternal home. He accomplished this by his words and by his letters, and he accomplishes it daily by his miraculous signs. As

often as he serves [sic] us from the uproar of earthly affairs, what occurs is that we are caught like fish in the net of the faith and brought to shore.

5. When the net is said to be full of large fish, we are told how many, namely one hundred and fifty-three.

6. The number has a deep and mysterious meaning, but the depth of so great a mystery confronts you as you contemplate it. The evangelist would not have told us the exact number unless he had judged it replete with mystery. You know that in the Old Testament every work is prescribed by the ten commandments, but in the New Testament the power of the same work is given to the increased number of faithful through the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit. The prophet foretells this when he speaks of *the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and devotion, and he filled him with the spirit of the fear of the Lord*. A person acquires the ability to work in this Spirit who acknowledges faith in the Trinity, believing that Father and Son and the same Holy Spirit are one power, and confessing that they are of one substance. Because there are seven commandments, given, as I've said, more widely by the New Testament, and ten given by the Old Testament, all of our power and work can be fully comprised by ten and seven. Let us multiply this seventeen by three, and we have fifty-one. This number possessed a deep and mysterious meaning, because we read in the Old Testament that the fiftieth year, in which the entire people is to rest from all work, is to be called a jubilee. True rest, though, consists in unity, since what is one cannot be divided: where there is division and separation there is no true rest. Let us multiply fifty-one by three, then, and we have one hundred and fifty-three. Because all our work, practiced through belief in the Trinity, tends toward rest, we multiply seventeen by three to arrive at fifty-one; and our true rest exists when even now we recognize the glory of the Trinity, which we hold as certainly existing in the unity of the divinity; and so we multiply fifty-one by three, and hold the complete number of the elect in our heavenly home to be like that number of

one hundred and fifty-three fish. And so the net that was let down after the Lord's resurrection was suited to catch a number of fish that would indicate the elect in our celestial home.

Handout 3

Sermon of Martin Luther
 "Sermon on the Raising of Lazarus, John 11:1-45,
 Preached on the Friday after Laetare,
 March 19, 1518 "¹

Notes and Instructions

The bracketed items in the sermon are those found in the Doberstein text. Two footnotes that were in the Doberstein text were retained for clarification, but other phrases, sentences, and footnotes that were in the Doberstein text are left out of the copy below, to shorten the piece somewhat. As with the Gregory sermons, the paragraphs in this one have been numbered, to help in quick reference during discussion. The sermon stops abruptly, without a proper ending; there is no explanation for this.

Instructions:

Read John 11:1-45 and jot down (a) the message of the story as you understand it and/or (b) the most important insight(s) that come to you as you read. Then read the sermon, preferably out loud.

1. Dear Friends of Christ. I have told you the story of this Gospel in order that you may picture in your hearts and remember well that Christ our God, in all the Gospels, from beginning to end, and also all writings of the prophets and apostles, desires of us nothing else but that we should have a sure and confident heart and trust in him.

2. Augustine writes that we find in the Scriptures three dead persons whom Christ restored to life. First, a twelve-year-old girl, when he was alone in a house, behind closed doors, and in the presence only of the parents of the deceased girl and his intimate disciples

¹ Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Raising of Lazarus," in Luther's Works, vol. 51, ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein, general ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 44-49. Used by permission.

[Matt. 9:18-26]. Second, the only son of a widow, who was being carried out through the gate in the presence of all the people [Luke 7:11-17]. Third, Lazarus, of whom this Gospel tells us, is not raised by Christ privately in a house or at the gate, but one who had been in the grave for four days and is raised in the presence of many Jews and near Jerusalem.

3. According to Augustine's teaching, these three dead persons are to be understood as three kinds of sinners. The first are those whose souls have died.² This is when temptation comes and conquers and captures the heart, so that one consents to sin. Then follows a sense of pleasure and the evil poison begins to work its way in, kills the soul, and subjects it to the devil. This is represented by the twelve-year-old girl. This kind rises up without too much difficulty after a fall. With persons of this kind God deals in a very tender way. He speaks to them secretly, sends inward instruction to their hearts, which they alone hear and cannot evade, and prepares for them a rod of chastisement, which they must suffer to their grief.

4. The second dead person signifies those who have fallen into works,³ so that they have to be carried, since they cannot walk by themselves. These must take heed; otherwise, since one thing leads to another, they may, as St. Gregory says, be completely overborne by the weight of sins. It is the bier in which the dead person is carried.

5. Lazarus, finally, signifies those who are so entangled in sin that they go beyond all bounds; they drift into a habit [of sinning] which then becomes their very nature. They know nothing but sin; they stink and are buried in sin. It takes a lot of work [to save them]. This is shown by the fact that in the case of the maiden Christ had only to take her by the hand and she immediately became alive [Matt. 9:25]. The young man, however, sat upright, but not so easily as in the case of the maiden, for Luke writes that Christ first

² The soul as mind and heart which is attracted to and assents to sin.

³ That is, they have not only consented to sin in their hearts and minds, but have committed a sinful act.

touched the bier and afterwards said, "Young man, I say to you, arise" [Luke 7:14]. This had to be accomplished through a command. But in this story, Christ looked up to heaven and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me," and then cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, Lazarus, come out" [John 11:41, 43]. And he came out, bound hand and foot, and his face also, and the apostles had to unbind him. This is the grave, the tomb: habituation in sin.

6. A question. If it is true that Lazarus and the other dead persons must be understood as signifying sin, how does this accord with the Gospel when the evangelist says in the speech of Martha, "Lord, he whom you love is ill" and "See how he loved him"? [John 11:3, 36]. Is it not true that Christ does not love the sinner but rather the truth, as the Scriptures says, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness" [Ps. 45:7] and "In my sight the sinner is scorned"? [cf. Ps. 5:5]. The answer is this: My dear man, [comfort yourself with this saying,] "I came not for the sake of the righteous, but to make righteous what is unrighteous and sinful and to lead the sinners to repentance" [cf. Matt. 9:13].

7. The whole human race was worthy of hatred, and yet Christ loved us. For if he had not loved us, he would not have descended from heaven. For the prophet says in the psalm: "There is none that does good," except one; "they have all become corrupt and sinners" [cf. Ps. 14:3] except Christ alone. So Christ loves the sinner at the command of the Father, who sent Him for our comfort. So the Father wills that we should look to Christ's humanity and love him in return, but yet in such a way as to remember that he did all this at the bidding of Father's supreme good pleasure. Otherwise it is terrifying to think of Christ. For to the Father is ascribed power, to the Son, wisdom, and to the Holy Spirit goodness, which we can never attain and of which we must despair.

8. But when we know and consider that Christ came down from heaven and loved sinners in obedience to the Father, then there springs up in us a bold approach to and firm hope in Christ. We learn that Christ is the real epistle, the golden book, in which we read

and learn how he always kept before him the will of the Father. So Christ is the "access to the Father" [Eph. 2:18] as St. Paul says. And John too bears witness that Christ said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" [John 14:6]. . . . Now we see that there is no shorter way to the Father except that we love Christ, hope and trust in him, boldly look to him for everything good, learn to know and praise him. For then it will be impossible that we should have a miserable, frightened, dejected conscience; in Christ it will be heartened and refreshed. But the Scriptures say concerning the sinners: "The wicked shall perish and be driven away like dust" [cf. Ps. 1:4, 6]. Therefore the sinners flee and know not where to go; for when the conscience does not hope and trust in God it cowers and trembles before the purity and righteousness of God. It can have no sweet assurance; it flees and still has nowhere to go unless it finds and catches hold of Christ, the true door and anchor. Yes, this is the way that all Christians should learn. But we go plunging on, taking hold in our own name, with our understanding and reason, and do not see or ever take to heart how kindly sweetly, and lovingly Christ has dealt with people. For the Father commanded him to do so. This tastes sweet to the faithful soul and it gives all the glory, praise, and honor to the Father through the Son, Christ Jesus. So God has nothing but the best and he offers it to us, weeds us, sustains us, and cares for us through his Son. That's the way our hearts are changed to follow Christ. . . .

9. Christ says, "Everything that my Father commands me I do" [John 14:31], and "I thank thee, dear Father, that thou hearest me always; but not for my sake, but for the sake of those who are standing down here, that they may believe that thou didst send me" [John 11:41-42]. What he is saying is: If they see my love and my works, and that thou art effecting them, and that thou hast commanded me to do them, then they will be at one with thee and will know thee through me and my works; out of which then will grow thy love toward them, O Father. The reason why Christ loves sinners is that his Father commanded

him to do so. For in Christ the Father pours himself out in his grace. And all this serves to the end that we freely hope in Christ and trust him unafraid.

10. Therefore, let the works go, no matter how great they may be, prayers, chants, yammering, and yapping; for it is certain that nobody will ever get to God through all these things. Besides, it is impossible. Rather the heart must have love for Christ, and through him for the Father. It's all lost if the heart is not cleansed. It must all be left behind, and we must freely, boldly, and with sure confidence take the leap into God. That's what he wants of us.

11. But when we put forward our works, the devil will use them for his own end, and that's just what he does do with them. Let us therefore learn to know from the Gospel how kindly Christ deals with us; then we shall without a doubt love him and avoid sinning, and so see everything in a different light. See how kindly he draws our hearts to himself, this faithful God. He loves Lazarus, who was a sinner. He tolerates the timid faith of his disciples when they say, "Oh, Lord, don't go to Jerusalem, they will kill you" [John 11:8]. All this he would have condemned, if he had wanted to deal harshly. . . . And what about Mary and Martha? "Oh, Lord," they said, "if you had been here, our brother would not have died" [John 11:2]. And also they were earthly, so that they were unable to refrain from weeping and the people had come to them to console them because of the death of their brother, as the evangelist describes so skillfully. From this we learn that they were all in unbelief and sin. And then we see how kindly the Lord deals with them, praying and weeping with them, and all this at the behest of his Father. This is the true guidebook, from which we learn the will of the eternal Father.

12. Take note, then, all you who have a timid conscience, that you will not be saved by this or that work. For it will fare with you as with one who works in a sandpit; the more sand he shovels out the more falls upon him. That's why many have gone mad . . . so that they began to imagine things, one that he was a worm, another that he was a mouse,

and so on. Just commit it to God and say: "Oh, my dear God, I have sinned, but I confess it to thee, I pour it out to thee and pray thee for help; do thou help me!" This is what God wants of us.

13. That's why I should like sermons about the saints to be more moderate in the sense that we would also tell how *they* fell, in accord with the gospel, not the books of rhetoric. For there can be no doubt that they too tripped and stumbled over great humps. They were of one flesh with us, one faith, one baptism, one blood. But we have now set them so high above us that we must despair of imitating them. Thus, for example, the gospel speaks of Peter after his confession concerning Christ, when he said to him, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" [Matt. 16:16]. But soon afterwards he had to take these words: "Get behind me, Satan, you devil!" [Matt. 16:23] whereas just a while before he had been told, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona!" [Matt. 16:17]. Just look; first he is blessed and holy, and afterwards he topples into hell and is called a devil.

14. So it is: every one of us by himself is a devil, but in Christ we are holy. So when we thus connect the saints with Christ, they are Christ's true saints; but if we are not to despair, we must follow him.

15. This Gospel therefore expresses nothing but the sweetness of Christ in his obedience to the Father and that he bestows nothing because of merit. Therefore, when the devil assaults us with temptation, you say this: "Ah, even though I have done nothing that is good, nevertheless I will not despair, for He always dealt with men sweetly," and that is true. . . . This the Scriptures show again and again. In Ecclesiasticus [2:10] it is written, "Who was ever forsaken by God?" Jerome says, "Cursed be he who holds that Christ's power is flesh," and again, "Blessed be he who hopes in God." And to Jeremiah God says, "Hear me, because you have hoped in me, I will deliver you with power, and even though the city go down, I will preserve you" [Jer. 39:16-18]. From this we should learn how Christ loves us, even though he might justly be angry, in order that we should also

love our brethren. Look, this is the way God treats you! What are you going to do? You too must have a heart that is sweet toward him. Do this, then forthwith! This I say in order that . . .

Questions and Tasks

1. Luther did not deal with the passage verse by verse but chose to focus upon an overall message. What is that message and how does it differ from the message you saw?
2. Luther began his sermon with an allegory proposed by St. Augustine. What use did Luther make of it and how is his use of allegory different from Gregory's?
3. Go back through the sermon and underline each place in the sermon that mentions God or Jesus loving humans or dealing kindly with them. Circle each place in which the sermon speaks of our faith/trust/hope in Christ.
4. Both Luther's sermon and Gregory's are loving and pastoral. How do they differ in emphasis?
5. Luther brings in other quotations from scripture but not in the "testimony" fashion of Gregory the Great. Which way seems more logical to you and why?

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Handout 4

Sermon of Friedrich Schleiermacher
 "The Effects of Scripture and the Immediate Effects of the Redeemer"¹

Notes and Instructions:

Schleiermacher used neither manuscript nor notes for preaching. The sermons we have were taken down by admirers as Schleiermacher preached or were written out from memory by Schleiermacher himself. This particular sermon was preached some time before 1826.

The sermon is long, but it has the advantage of speaking directly about scripture as well as demonstrating Schleiermacher's use of scripture. It also clarifies Schleiermacher's position on Christian religious experience and speaks to issues that are debated today. Because of the sermon's length, several sentences have been omitted. The parenthetical remarks and any italics were in the de Vries translation.

Instructions:

Read Luke 24:13-35, the entire story from which Schleiermacher's text is taken. Then reread verses 30-32. Read the sermon through, out loud if possible.

1. My good friends! The words just read are the continuation of that wonderful story of Easter, a story that belongs to the present day in a special way. In a narrative that follows this one, once again from the days of our Lord's resurrection, the evangelist mentions the same thing: that above all else he opened the scriptures to his disciples at this time and showed them that the Christ had to suffer in order to enter into his glory. That is what we find in this passage as well. The two disciples, when they had recognized the

¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, "The Effects of Scripture and the Immediate Effects of the Redeemer," in Servant of the Word, trans. Dawn de Vries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 100-16. Used by permission.

Lord, remembered what he had said to them along the way, and how they were moved by it. We see two things here. First, the Lord deliberately took special care to make clear to his disciples the scripture that bore witness to him. This he did especially during those last days of his human companionship with them, which had already been interrupted. But at the same time, we see, secondly, that, as in almost all these narratives, there was something else which neither the scripture in itself nor even Christ's explanation of it could bring about. Despite the fact that the disciples' hearts had burned along the way when he opened the scripture to them, they still did not recognize him. That happened only when he sat at table with them, broke the bread with the customary thanksgiving, and divided it among them. Only then did they recognize him.

2. The disciples did not attribute even the burning of their hearts within them to the scripture, but rather to Christ's way of using it and expounding it, from which they thought they actually should have recognized him already. We see here, then, two things: the effects of scripture and the immediate effects of the Lord, which radiate purely from his person in the company of his own. The precise relationship between these two effects can become especially clear to us from this story; then we can apply it to ourselves also and to the present circumstances of the Christian church. Under the guidance of these words, then, let us consider the connection between the effects of the scripture and the immediate, personal effects of the Redeemer. First, however, we must determine whether something really different is intended by these two expressions. Then, under the guidance of what is found in our text, we must examine the relationship of the two to each other.

I.

3. Now the first question, about the nature of the scripture and its effects, may appear to require little or no further explanation. But to understand our concern with it in its full scope, we must say something on the subject. First, the scripture that the Lord opened to the disciples as he went along the way with them was the Old Testament. It was

the prophecies about the one who should come, the devout visions of God's servants of old about the course of God's dealings with the people of Israel and, through them, with the entire human race. This is the only scripture to which our text could refer. Should we, then, also restrict ourselves to the Old Testament and ask chiefly about its effects? If we did so, my good friends, we would totally misconstrue our position and its distinctive advantages. . . . The scripture that presents the Lord to us in his life and works on earth, that preserves for us the precious words of his mouth--the scripture of the New Testament--is greater and far more important for us than the Old Testament. These apostolic scriptures are for us the firm prophetic word on which we depend and the foundation of our faith.

4. In the second place, however, when the Lord opened the scripture to his disciples, he certainly did not communicate to them only by repeating what they could have read for themselves. Rather, he sought to initiate them into the connections that had remained hidden from them; it was this that made their hearts burn within them when the deeper sense of the promises about Christ were disclosed to them. That is why we in the Christian church in general, but especially in the evangelical church that is founded and supported chiefly, indeed solely, on the Word of God in scripture, should always join the explanation of scripture to the scripture itself, so that it is never demeaned by us to a dead letter. The scripture is a treasure shared by us all; but as Christ did then, the Spirit of God after him, and still today, reveals and explains this treasure to believers in his own way and according to his own measure. To one person he reveals this, to another, that; to one person more clearly, while to another less clearly and lucidly. For this reason we rightly feel obligated to exchange these insights with one another and to distribute our knowledge, one learning from another and one teaching another, knowing well that such communication does not conflict with the precious word of promise that the Lord himself applied to us: that every Christian deserves by right to be taught of God (John 6:45). For it is never a human work and word that is of benefit to us; rather, it is the effect of the Holy Spirit in and through the

Word that alone enables us to enrich and strengthen one another. Whenever he appeared to his disciples in those days, the Lord communicated to them something new from his treasure. And so at no time does he fail to produce in his church those students of scripture, well-educated to the Kingdom of Heaven, to whom God's Spirit gives from his treasure, along with the old and proven things, new insights (Matt. 13-52) that enlighten us and make our hearts burn within us. I am sure you will gladly testify, dear friends, that from the time you received the milk of the gospel in your first instruction in Christianity, right up until the present day, every such encounter with scripture was like a new, joyous, and powerful appearance of the Lord himself. May we never fail to have such blessed experiences in the future!

5. But now, what about the other main point of our text, the immediate and personal effects of the Redeemer? We can easily imagine what these effects were during the time the Redeemer walked on earth. . . . Even though the evangelists do not tell us explicitly that, during the period of his public ministry, he conversed with disciples about the scripture and interpreted its entire message to them, no one will doubt that this was sometimes the subject of their questions to him and his discourses with them. But in these conversations there was also something of that other effect--an impression, independent of the subject at hand, that was always the same, although it was manifested in the most various forms and widely divergent conditions throughout his entire association with them. And it was this impression that Christ's whole personality, his distinctive nature however it might express itself, never failed to create. Through it their faith in him first arose, because it enabled them to recognize in him the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father; and by it their faith was later sustained and strengthened. Now if this impression came to them as the Lord spoke words of doctrine and admonition to them which afterward became the source of their own instruction to Christians, then this is something that in essence belongs for us entirely to the effects of scripture. Yet, the reason why their hearts burned within them was

precisely because of the immediacy of his impression; the way in which the loving movements of the divine disposition was reflected in Jesus' outward bearing, the strength of conviction expressed in his heavenly, clear eyes, and everything else we could mention by which the glory of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth, was to be beheld in him (John 1:14). I admit, however, that all these things are connected with Christ's personal appearance and so seem to belong solely to the period of his earthly life; none of them seems to be available to us.

6. Nevertheless, my good friends, we too have precious words of Promise that we do not want to let go. First this: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). Then that other: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Could Christ have meant by these words nothing but the effects that the Word portraying him in the New Testament . . . must bring about in the hearts of those who longed for salvation but had not been able to enjoy his personal acquaintance and influence? And is this all he has left for us? We can scarcely think so! The inequality of it seems to be too great--indeed, unfair! But if we try to specify exactly what the immediate influences of the Lord upon the soul could be now that he no longer walks in person on earth, influences that are not effects of that Word, we find ourselves once again in a predicament from which we see no escape. It will be easier for us to understand why, for such a long time, Christians have . . . divided over it. In every Christian communion there are those who boast much of the spiritual nearness, the immediate influence, of the Lord as experiences of their own souls. But in every Christian church, there are others who are entirely lacking in such experiences and who know how to cite all kinds of examples of how much that is purely human, or (to put it bluntly) how many illusions, creep in along with what is usually represented as such an extraordinary and immediate effect of the Lord. They want to abandon all hopes for such immediate experiences and to heed exclusively the Word of the Lord and its saving effects, because they are rightly

concerned that many things totally alien to the spirit and intention of the Redeemer could insinuate themselves into the faith and life of Christians through such imagined or alleged influences of Christ. And so they argue that every Christian must be fully satisfied with scripture alone.

7. Now one cannot deny, upon closer consideration, that if we set aside the efficacy of speech and word, then what the Redeemer worked immediately in people's hearts through the impression of his person while he lived on earth was something similar to his miracles properly so called. Like the miracles, it appears to us as a mysterious power over the soul. If miracles have really disappeared from the Christian church . . . then it seems that we should also no longer expect from his mysterious nature the effects most similar to miracles. Otherwise, the relationship of the Redeemer to Christians would not always have the same foundation. Indeed, we could say that anyone who has rightly recognized the treasure given to us in God's Word and has submitted to its effects in purity and honesty, faithfulness and obedience, will testify that he has complete satisfaction in this treasure and that Christ works so powerfully through his Word that we require nothing beside it.

8. Can we, then, on this basis, resolve to scorn or to belittle all those experiences? Surely not! We may deride them even less the more frequently they occur, and we find that the souls who boast of them undeniably display all the glorious effects of God's Word as well, so that a true Christian life takes shape in them and from them, to the edification and awakening of all who can perceive it. Love requires that those Christians who are not conscious of such experiences in themselves not deny them in others. It places upon them the duty of helping their brothers more and more to distinguish the true and sure aspects of these experiences from what is uncertain and false in them. We must ask, then, whether there is something in God's Word that can give us guidance in this matter. During this festive time, we are pointed especially to the narratives from the days of the Resurrection; and these have a closer relation to us precisely because the Redeemer's personal presence

was no longer the same as it had been. These narratives have two illustrations to offer to us that we can hold to for now.

9. The first is found in the narrative of our text. The Lord himself sits at table with his two disciples. He takes the bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and distributes it to them; then they recognize him before he disappears from them. Insofar as this was the bread of a meal among friends, and they recognized him because he acted the way they had seen so often before, under similar circumstances, it was a reminder of his earlier life that so worked upon them. But does not this narrative remind us particularly of the Holy Supper that was connected with just such a meal? And does not the special effect that many believers (not to say all of them) credit to this sacrament have a strong resemblance to the experience of the disciples? Is it not a true recognition after the eyes had long been held shut? A lively representation that all at once renews a host of earlier moments when our hearts burned within us? And does this glorification of Christ in the soul really depend on the words of institution, or even on the well-intentioned words of admonition that the servant of the Word adds to them? If it did, we would have to ascribe to their words . . . something miraculous or even magical. But actually we see how independent these effects are from everything connected with words, from all the various opinions and explanations about the meaning of the sacrament. But if we are to say something understandable about it, as far as human limitations allow, what else can we say than that these are continuations and consequences of the immediate, personal influence of Christ? And we refuse to believe anyone who would go against the testimony of by far the greater part of Christians and deny that there is anything special about the Holy Supper

10. The second illustration from the days of the resurrection is this: the Lord approached his disciples several times, when they were gathered in the evening, and called out to them, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19; 21-26). . . . It is true that this was a word and only a word. But can we think that it was an ineffective word, or did his peace actually

come over them when he spoke it? And if we must suppose that this was what happened, was it an effect of the words themselves, so that simply as words they created what they desired? No one will accept such a magical interpretation rather than confess that the peace that came over the disciples was the immediate effect of the Lord himself as he made his appearance to them; conscious of this effect, he pronounced the words.

11. But must this effect be tied to his bodily, personal presence? Or should we not all be capable of having this experience in special moments? And is it not just as independent of a bodily appearance of Christ as of any particular word of scripture that we vaguely remember and to which we could trace such a condition? All devout Christians have surely had such experiences! When we realize that the peace that comes over us in such blessed moments is *his* peace, the peace of his redemption, the peace of those who have become God's children through faith in his name, do we have any choice but to recognize our entire condition as his gift and to ascribe it to his power and efficacy in us?

12. Both these experiences, neither of which is so unusual, lead us to the conclusion that beside the immediate effects of the Word there are also distinctive effects of the Redeemer that issue, so to say, from his whole and undivided being. And this is not dependent on his bodily appearance for its efficacy. The original spiritual efficacy of his existence is, of course, mediated only through the Word; but it is maintained in its characteristic nature within the communion of the faithful. Thus the original impression constantly takes shape anew in individual hearts, and on particular occasions it becomes efficacious in them in a wonderful way as that peace of soul and certainty of the heart that nothing in the world can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:38-39)

13. Why should the ordinary believer not be convinced of this? Should we be accused of fanaticism for making such assertions about Christ? We surely experience something similar in the domain of purely human life as well, if only we look deeply enough into the conditions of our hearts. Even without the written word, we often feel in

our souls the effects of distant loved ones, and even of friends who are no longer here below. They warn, encourage, correct, and illumine us, so that we are compelled to say, "This comes to me because of my union with this friend; this is his word and work in my inner self." What is more, we encounter the same thing in connection with people we know only through their influence in the world, people we have particularly set up as leading heroes and shining examples. If we count among the marks of human greatness the fact that the total being of one individual can affect the inner lives of many others decisively and to an extraordinary degree, how can we fail to include the same mark in the greatness of One who is exalted above all others? . . .

14. This, then, is certain: just as in the Lord's own day, so even now both kinds of effect are present together. We rejoice in the effects of the scripture and God's Word in scripture; but we do not lack the personal effects of the Redeemer. Dependent upon his earlier existence on earth, they are nonetheless powerful continuations of it that extend over every age. And as it is now, so it will remain; Christ will never forsake his church, for then she would be abandoned indeed! Just as God's Word will never be taken from us, so neither will the Lord deprive believers of these more mysterious effects.

II.

15. Now, however, we must ask, how are these two effects of divine activity related to each other in God's Kingdom, and, second, how should each individual relate to the two? On these questions the narrative of our text provides ample information. By showing us that in each--in the Word and in the personal impression of the Redeemer--there lies a distinctive strength that the other lacks, our text teaches us that the two must always be united and exist together in the Christian church, so they will complement each other.

16. When the hearts of the disciples burned within them, it was no longer only the effect of the Word, but, unbeknown to them, the total personality of their Master was working with the Word. It was, however, purely the effect of the Word rightly interpreted

that the disciples abandoned the dejection and hopelessness that had caused the Redeemer to scold them, so that the recognition was revealed to their hearts that Jesus of Nazareth's death on the cross did not contradict his claim to be the one who was to redeem Israel. But how much they would have lost had the Redeemer been separated from them after he communicated this conviction to them through the power of the Word rightly applied! They were comforted at once, and at once they were attracted to this unknown person because of the loving zeal of his discourse so that their hearts burned within them (already more than the mere power of scripture proofs could effect). Still, their eyes remained closed, and they did not recognize the Lord. But when he broke bread, the way he gave himself up to them in the hour of refreshment made them recognize what all the insight and wisdom he revealed to them from scripture had not previously been able to show. Although himself the guest, he was their host and provider. On the other hand, had he only wanted recognition from them in this way and only the kind of faith in him that rests on such a recognition, he would have begun and ended with the supper. But then, by this means alone, they would not have attained an understanding of the connection between his story and the scripture. For this reason, he begins with an explanation of scripture, and ends with the supper, even though sometimes he did just the reverse. Thus, my dear friends, we must state in the first place that both the effects of the Word and the immediate, spiritual presence of the Lord should always be united with each other in the Christian church.

17. We are all aware of the glorious treasure we have in God's Word, and we as members of the evangelical church are especially called to be the guardians and keepers of the Word for all Christendom. . . . If this were all, however, would we be certain that we had and held true and vital Christianity among us? . . . There are many people who, when they behold from a distance the commandments Christ gave to his own, the ordinances he established in the early church, the exemplary nature of his life, and the characteristic

features of the way he acted as a person, also feel something special there, so that their heart likewise burns within them. But their eyes remain closed, and they do not come to that joyous, immediate recognition that this is the Lord, that here is manifested the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father, that here alone are the Words of life. True and vital Christianity rest on this recognition alone; we must admit that Christianity cannot be preserved or spread among us unless the effects that come from the living memory and spiritual presence of Christ and are based upon the whole of his nature and manifestation are added to what is, in the narrowest and most particular sense, the effect of Word and doctrine. . . . Often enough in our own church we have been--perhaps still are--content with the mere letter of orthodox doctrine, without giving effective evidence of a true Christian disposition. We all know this from our own experience. But we do not usually find this problem in those who are susceptible to the personal influences of Christ.

18. Besides, consider how many difficulties one finds in interpreting the Word of scripture. It comes from a remote time, deals with strange customs, and was written in a language only slightly related to our own. . . . How many sad examples do we see in which caprice actually has been exerted . . . to read into scripture something not in accord with the original spirit of Christian faith. . . . How necessary it is, then, that scripture be complemented by something that works from the inside. And what else is there but that continuing work of the Redeemer himself, those living impressions he creates even now immediately in the human soul? This is what must ever come to the aid of the Word in the Christian church, just as in the Redeemer's own life the two were always united and supported each other.

19. But if we wanted to give ourselves solely to these immediate influences, despising the clear and precious treasure of God's Word in comparison with them, we would without a doubt be exposed to dangers just as great, if not greater. One cannot deny that from time immemorial much that betrays the unruliness, fanaticism, and excesses of

the human heart has often crept into what is supposed to be the Lord's immediate effects in the soul. God's Word must ever remain the standard for measuring and judging everything else if we are to avoid deceiving ourselves into unintentionally confusing the human and the divine, or falling into the danger of becoming prey to those who intentionally substitute or pass off the human for the divine. The Lord cannot be different in his effects in believers' souls than he reveals himself to be in his Word. . . .

20. We should thank God, then, if both effects are always together in the Christian church and are always reacting upon each other. The immediate testimony of the Lord's efficacy in the soul must continually animate the effects of the Word; the holy authority of the Word must provide a firm rule for all that happens in the hearts of Christians, so that all may be held together in the unity of faith and each may submit to the consensus of the community. So may we all remain in the truth that makes us free.

21. But, my dear friends, there is another question that we have yet to answer. . . . That is, how should each individual relate to these two effects that our spiritual life rest upon? In answering this question, we must consider above all the word of the apostle, "The body is one and has many members" (I Cor. 12:12), each one of a distinctive kind. Within the Christian congregation, God appointed one person to one task, another to another, and no one can do everything. In the Christian church, both effects must be united; the clear, intelligible, and easily communicable efficacy of the Word, and the more mysterious but immediate truth of the Redeemer that stirs the depths of the soul. An equal measure of the two effects, however, has not been ordained for everyone. God is a God of order in the church only because he is a God who creates diversity; it is only in diversity that order occurs and is rightly maintained.

22. Each, then, must cling to the particular task to which he is called. We should value those who cling to God's Word with lively zeal and sincere faithfulness, relying on the Redeemer's teaching and example that they draw from the Word. They are perhaps too

suspicious of immediate inner experiences of the heart. But . . . how could we despise them for lacking something that others have attained, when they are striving for the same goal as the others? How could they not be valuable to us as the most zealous guardians of the great and common treasure we all possess in the written Word of the Lord? They draw from this Word because they know that it is the well that never runs dry, the well that holds the Water of Life. And if they harbor suspicion about many things that other Christians boast of as special, gracious proofs of God, what right do we have not to regard this mistrust, too, as a voice of God in them and for them, since they stand as members of the Lord's communion under the same care as we do? Probably they need to be so warned because of their particular disposition. Or perhaps others entrusted to their care need this mistrust and caution since they might be more inclined than others to be misled, . . . Thus we are content to conclude that the blessing that can arise only through this inner working of the Redeemer in the soul is dispersed on these fellow Christians as well, at least indirectly, by means of the many contacts they have in Christian fellowship.

23. And we want to regard those who lay special claim to such experiences of the Redeemer's spiritual presence in the same way. If only they hold on to the standard of God's Word and do not want to remove their own special experiences from its judgment and supervision! If only they do not want to force their light on the rest of us, and do not look askance when we exercise our freedom in appreciating and using their experiences only insofar as we find them to be in agreement with God's Word. . . .

24. If each of us goes his own way, however, and merely accepts with gratitude the task to which God called and appointed him, then we are not yet doing justice to brotherly love; we are only granting to others their own rights without curtailing those rights by actual disparagement. But love requires that each remain open to the special gift of another. Fellowship exists--the many and various members are one body--only insofar as all devote themselves to such a mutual influence and each respects and uses as a manifestation and

gift of the Spirit the good that arises from the distinctive life of another. Then despite all the diversity in the inner conduct on individuals, no breach of fellowship will result; each will attribute to the One from whom they both come his own immediate experiences and the claims of others to a special blessing. He is the One who wills to be honored in both, just as he made them both fruitful in his church so that they would be presented before him ever more perfectly, without spot or blame.

25. Now whichever good each of us may experience more abundantly according to his calling, whether the blessing of the Word or the immediate spiritual presence of the Lord in the soul, we all have the same task. As soon as something extraordinary has come to us from either source, we must imitate the two disciples in our text. After they had recognized the Lord, and remembered how their hearts had already burned on the way, when he explained the scripture to them, we are told that they arose immediately from their meal . . . and returned to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples, . . . that the Lord was risen indeed.

26. And that, my good friends, is how we want to keep it always. Each of us should make his own inner experiences and every blessing we receive from the Lord into a common blessing by returning and communicating to others what has happened to us and how it happened. We are pupils of one Teacher, disciples of one Master, all called by him in the same way for this end: to edify, strengthen, and establish one another in faith and love for the Lord by means of everything he gives to each of us from his fullness and according to his grace and mercy. Now to him who has promised to be present with us until the end of the world through the power of his Word and the gracious outpourings of his love that communicates with us, to him be hearty thanks for all we have already received and will continue to receive, and also for what we draw from his own in many different ways! And let each one regard it his duty to communicate all the gifts of Spirit to

others in sincere love and faithfulness, so that in everything he will be praised, to whom alone all praise and glory be offered by us, now and forever. Amen.

Write down your answers to the following questions:

1. Do you relate more to those who experience Christ through scripture or have you had a direct and immediate experience of Christ's presence? Have you experienced Christ in both ways? Explain.
2. Point out how Schleiermacher's talk about Jesus Christ differs from Luther's. Cite paragraph numbers, if possible. Do you relate more to Schleiermacher or Luther and why?
3. In this sermon Schleiermacher speaks positively about a personal experience of Christ. Where do you see evidence that Schleiermacher also values the community of believers?
4. How does Schleiermacher make this scripture relevant to his congregation?
5. Thomas Muntzer, one of the more radical reformers who valued the leading of the Holy Spirit, once criticized those who held too closely to the text of the Bible: "it is of no use," said Muntzer "to have swallowed the Bible 100,000 times," if one does not have the Holy Spirit; to which Martin Luther replied that "he would not listen to Muntzer even though he had swallowed the Holy Ghost, feathers and all, unless he adduced Scripture."² Do you think that Schleiermacher's description of "the immediate effects of the Lord, which radiate purely from his person in the company of his own," (page 3, paragraph 2 of the sermon) is similar to what Muntzer meant by "hav[ing] the Holy Spirit"? Why or why

² As quoted in Roland H. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in The West from the Reformation to the Present Day, vol. 3 of The Cambridge History of the Bible, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 33.

not? Which paragraphs give you an idea of where Schleiermacher would stand in the Muntzer/Luther debate?

7. What particular word does Schleiermacher use again and again to refer to scripture? Can you point to passages in this sermon that say why Schleiermacher thinks scripture is important?

8. Luther thought that parts of scripture were more authoritative than others. Do you think Schleiermacher might have thought the same? Why?

Now read the sermon again, this time with the following questions in mind.

9. In dealing with this passage does Schleiermacher seem to allegorize anything?

10. In which paragraphs does Schleiermacher clarify language for his congregation?

11. In this sermon Schleiermacher does not stay with the text, but uses it to talk generally about the relationship of scripture to the direct experience of Jesus Christ.

Nonetheless, how does he demonstrate that he is aware that the writer composed this text in a certain way? To say it a bit differently, how does Schleiermacher interpret the parts of this text in light of the whole, thereby indicating that he recognized the author's intention to put things together in this particular way?

Handout 5

Sermon of Benjamin B. Warfield
"The Prodigal Son"¹

Notes and Instructions

A volume of Warfield's sermons was published in 1903, and the volume containing this sermon was published in 1915. It is reasonable to assume that this sermon was preached sometime between 1903 and 1915. It was preached at the chapel at Princeton Theological Seminary before a congregation of students and teachers.² Because the sermon is long, portions have been omitted.

Read the entire fifteenth chapter of Luke. Then read the Warfield sermon, preferably out loud.

1. I wish to speak to you today of the parable of the prodigal son, or, as it is becoming very common to call it, perhaps with greater exactness, the parable of the lost son. Probably no passage of the Scriptures is more widely known or more universally admired. The conversation and literature of devotion are full of allusions to it. And in the conversation and literature of the world it has far from an unhonoured place.

2. It owes the high appreciation it has won, no doubt, in large part to the exquisiteness of its literary form. . . . Nothing could exceed the chaste perfection of the narrative, the picturesque truth of its portraiture, the psychological delicacy of its analysis. Here is a gem of story-telling, which must be pronounced nothing less than artistically perfect, whether viewed in its general impression, or in the elaboration of its details. We

¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Prodigal Son," in Biblical and Theological Studies, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1952), 523-42. Used by permission.

² Samuel G. Craig, preface to Biblical and Theological Studies, v.

must add to its literary beauty, however, the preciousness of the lesson it conveys before we account for the place it has won for itself in the hearts of men. In this setting of fretted gold, a marvel of the artificer, there lies a priceless jewel; and this jewel is displayed to such advantage by its setting that men cannot choose but see and admire.

3. Indeed, we may even say that the universal admiration the parable commands has finished by becoming in some quarters a little excessive. The message which the parable brings us is certainly a great one. To lost sinners like you and me, assuredly few messages could appeal with more overwhelming force. Our hearts are wrung within us as we are made to realize that our Father in heaven will receive our wandering souls back with the joy with which this father in the parable received back his errant son. But it is an exaggeration to represent this message as all the Gospel, or even as the core of the Gospel; and to speak of this parable therefore, as it has become widely common to speak of it, as "the Gospel in the Gospel," or even as the summation of the Gospel. It is not that. There are many truths which it has no power to teach us that are essential to the integrity of the Gospel: nay, the very heart of the Gospel is not in it. And, therefore, precious as this parable is to us, and priceless as is its message, there are many other passages of Scripture more precious still, because their message enters more deeply into the substance of the Gospel. . . .

4. It is important that we should recognize this. For the exaggerated estimate which has been put upon this parable has borne bitter fruit in the world. Beginning with an effort to read into it all the Gospel, or at least the essence of the Gospel, it has ended by reading out of the Gospel all that is not in the parable. And thus this parable, the vehicle of a priceless message, has been transformed into the instrument of a great wrong. The worst things are often the corruption of the best: and the attempt to make the parable of the lost son the norm of the Gospel has resulted, I will not say merely in the curtailment of the Gospel,--I will say rather in the evisceration of the Gospel. On this platform there take their stand today a growing multitude the entire tendency and effect of all of whose efforts

it is to eliminate from Christianity all that gives it value in the world, all that makes it that religion which [sic] has saved the world, and to reduce it to the level of a merely natural religion. "The Christianity of the prodigal son is enough for us," they declare: and they declare this with gusto because, to put it briefly, they do not like the Christianity of the Bible or the Christianity of Christ, and are happy not to find them in the parable of the lost son.

5. Now, let us recognize frankly at the outset, that the reason why these new teachers of an unchristian Christianity do not find Christianity in the parable of the lost son is, briefly, because this parable does not set forth Christianity, but only a small fragment of Christian teaching. . . . The parable was not given to teach us Christianity, in its essence or its sum. It was given to teach us one single truth: a truth of the utmost value, not only full of emotional power, but, when placed in its relation to other truths, of the highest doctrinal significance; but not in itself sufficient to constitute Christianity, . . .

6. We observe, then, in the first place, that there is no atonement in this parable. And indeed it is precisely because there is no atonement in this parable that it has been seized upon by the modern tendency to which we have alluded, as the norm of the only Christianity it will profess. For nothing is more characteristic of this new type of Christianity than that it knows and will know nothing of an atonement. . . .

7. Nor is that more than the beginning of the matter. It must do with out a Christ as well. For, we must observe, the parable has as little of Christ in it as it has of an atonement. . . . neither is there any trace of any mission of a Son at all--even merely to plead with the wanderer, make known the Father's continued love to him, and win him back to his right relation to the Father. . . . In truth, there is in the parable no trace whatsoever of a Christ, in any form of mission. From all that appears from the narrative, the errant son was left absolutely alone in his sin, until, wholly of his own motion, he

conceived the idea of returning to the Father. If its teaching is to be the one exclusive source of our Christianity we must content ourselves therefore with a Christianity without Christ.

8. Nor is even this by any means all. For, as has no doubt been noted already, there is as little trace of the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the parable as of that of Christ. The old Pelagians were . . . quick to see this . . . See, they said, the prodigal moves wholly of his own power: there is no efficient grace here, no effectual calling, no regeneration of the Spirit. And there is not. If this parable is to constitute our Christianity, then our Christianity must do without these things.

9. And doing without these things, it must do without a Holy Spirit altogether. For there is not the slightest hint of a Holy Spirit in any conceivable activity he may be thought to employ in the whole parable. Reduce the mode and effect of His operation to the most attenuated possible. Allow Him merely to plead with men from without the penetralium of their personality, to exercise influences upon them only of the nature of persuasion, such as men can exercise upon one another--still there is no hint of such influences here. From all that appears, the prodigal *suo motu* turned to the Father and owed to no one so much as a suggestion, much less assistance, in his resolve or its execution. If our Christianity is to be derived from this parable only, we shall have to get along without any Holy Spirit.

10. And even this is only the beginning. We shall have to get along also without any God the Father. What! you say,--the whole parable concerns the father! But what a father is this? It is certainly not the Father of the Christian revelation and not the Father of the Christian heart. He permits his son to depart from him without apparent emotion; and so far as appears he endures the absence of his son without a pang,--making not the slightest endeavor to establish or maintain communication with him or to recover him either to good or to himself. If he manifests joy at the happy return of the son after so many days, there is not the least evidence that in all the intervening time he had expended upon him so much as a single message, much less brought to bear upon him the smallest inducement to return.

In other words, what we know as the "seeking love of God" is absolutely absent from the dealing of the father with the son as here depicted: that is, the love of God which most nearly concerns you and me as sinners is conspicuous only by its absence. In this respect the parable stands in its suggestions below the companion parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. When the shepherd lost his sheep, he left the ninety and nine in the wilderness and went after the lost one until he found it. When the woman lost her coin, she lit a candle and swept the house and sought diligently until she found it. But in the parable of the lost son, the father is not pictured as doing anything of the sort. The son leaves him and the son returns to him; and meanwhile the father, so far as appears, goes about his own affairs and leaves the son to go about his. So clear is it that this parable was not intended to embody the whole Gospel and does not contain even its essence. For what is the essence of the Gospel if it is not the seeking love of God?

11. The commentators, of course, have not left it so. Determined to get the Gospel out of the parable, they diligently go to work first to put it in. Thus one, in depicting the father's state of mind, grows eloquent in his description of his yearning love. "He has not forgotten his son, though he has forgotten him. He has been thinking of him during the long period of his absence. Probably he often cast glances along the road to see if perchance the erring one was returning, thinking he saw him in every stranger who made his appearance. He has continued looking, longing, till hope deferred has made the heart sick and weary to despair." Now no doubt the father felt all this. Only the parable does not tell us so. And it would not have omitted to tell us so, if this state of mind on the father's part entered into the essence of its teaching. The fact is that this commentator is rewriting the parable. He is not expounding the parable we have, but composing another parable, a different parable with different lessons. Our Lord, with His exquisitely nice adjustment of every detail of this parable to His purpose, we may be sure, has omitted nothing needed for the most poignant conveyance of the meaning He intended it to convey.

That the expositor feels it necessary to insert all this merely proves that he is bent on making the parable teach something foreign to it as it stands. What he has especially in mind to make it teach proves, as we read on, to be the autonomy of the human will. The lost thing, in the case of this parable, is a man: and because he is a man, and no lifeless thing nor an unthinking beast, we are told, he cannot, like the coin and the sheep, be sought. He must be left alone, to return, if return he ever does, wholly of his own motion and accord. Therefore, forsooth, the father's solicitude can only take the form of a waiting! *Seeking* love can be expended on a coin or a sheep, but not, it seems, on a man. In the case of a man, *waiting* love is all that is in place, or is possible. Is this the Gospel? Is this the Gospel even of these three parables? When we were told of the shepherd seeking his sheep, of the woman searching for her coin, was it of sheep and coins that the Master would have His hearers think? Does God care for oxen, or was it not altogether for our sakes that these parables too were spoken?

12. Into such self-contradictions, to say nothing of oppositions to the very *cor cordis* of the Gospel, do we fall when we refuse to be led by the text and begin to twist it like a nose of wax to the teaching of our own lessons. The fact is, the parable teaches us none of these things and we must not bend or break it in a vain effort to make it teach them. Even when another commentator more modestly tells us that the two earlier parables--those of the lost sheep and the lost coin--set forth mainly the seeking love of God; while the third--that of the lost son--"describes rather the rise and growth, responsive to that love, of repentance in the heart of man"; he has gone far beyond his warrant. Why say this parable teaches the rise and growth of repentance "responsive to the seeking love of God"? There is no seeking love of God in the parable's picture of the relation of the father to the lost son, as indeed had just been allowed, in the assignment of the teaching as to that to the preceding parables. But why say even that it describes "the rise and growth of repentance"? It does of course describe the path which one repentant sinner's feet trod as he returned to his

father: and so far as the case of one may be the case of all, we may therefore be said to have here, so far as the narrative goes, a typical instance. But there is no evidence that this description was intended as normative, and certainly no ground for finding in this the purpose of the parable. That purpose the text itself places elsewhere; and our wisdom certainly lies in refusing to turn the parable into allegory, reading into it all sorts of lessons which we fancy we may see lurking in its language here and there. We are safest in strictly confining ourselves to reading out of it the lesson it was designed to teach. This lesson was certainly not "the growth and course of sin" and "the growth and course of repentance"; but simply that "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." . . . we must beware of treating the parable as if its details belonged less to the picture than to something else which it seems to us adapted to illustrate. The only safe course is strictly to confine ourselves to the lesson the parable was framed to teach.

13. This is not to say, however, that this lesson is so single and simple that we can derive no teaching from the parable beyond what is compressible into a single proposition. It undoubtedly has its main lesson; but it could not well teach that lesson without teaching along with it certain subsidiary ones, closely connected with it as corollaries and supports, or at least implicated in the manner in which it is taught. Only, we must be very wary that we do not either on the one hand confuse these subsidiary things with the main lesson of the parable, or on the other read into it lessons of our own, fancifully derived from its mere forms of expression. We may perhaps illustrate what we mean and at the same time gather the teaching we may legitimately derive from the parable by asking ourselves now seriously what we do really learn from it.

14. . . . I think we may say that we may derive from it, in the first place,--in its context, in the way it is introduced and in its relation to the fellow-parables coupled with it--one of those subtle evidences of the deity of our Lord which are strewn through the synoptic Gospels. . . . It would seem impossible for the unprejudiced reader to glance over

these parables in their setting without feeling that both the evangelist and the Master as reported by him speak here out of an underlying consciousness of His divine claims and estate. For, note the occasion out of which these parables arose and the immediate end to which they are directed. The publicans and sinners were flocking to the gracious preaching of Jesus, and Jesus was so far from repelling them, that He welcomed them to Him and mixed in intimate intercourse with them. This the Pharisees and Scribes made the subject of unpleasant remark among themselves. And our Lord spoke these parables in defense of Himself against their attack. But now note how He defends Himself. By parables of a good shepherd seeking his lost sheep; of a distressed woman seeking her lost coin; of a deserted father receiving back his wayward child. We surely do not need to argue that the good shepherd, the distressed woman, the deserted father stands in each instance for God. . . . Yet these parables are spoken to vindicate not God's, but Jesus' reception of sinners. The underlying assumption that Jesus' action and God's action are one and the same thing is unmistakable: and no reader fails tacitly to recognize Jesus Himself under the good shepherd and the distressed woman and the deserted father. . . . Throughout the whole discussion there throbs thus the open implication that He [Jesus] bears the same relation to these sinners that the shepherd does to the sheep lost from the flock, the woman does to a coin lost from her store, the father does to a wandering child. And what is this but an equally open implication that He is in some mysterious way that Divine Being against whom all sin is committed, away from whose smile all sinners have turned, and back to whom they come when, repenting of their sin, they are recovered to good and to God?

15. In these parables, then, we see Jesus teaching with authority. And His divine voice is heard in them also rebuking sin. For the next thing, perhaps, which it behoves [sic] us to take notice of is the rebuke that sounds in them of the sin of spiritual pride and jealousy. This rebuke of course culminates in the portrait of the elder son and his unsympathetic attitude towards the rejoicing over his brother's return home, which

occupies the latter part of the parable of the lost son. . . . Its object is to hold up the mirror of fact to the Pharisaic objectors that they may see their conduct and attitude of mind in their true light. Their moving principle was not, as they fancied, a zeal for righteousness which would not have sin condoned, but just a mean-spirited jealousy which was incapable of the natural response of the human spirit in the presence of a great blessing. They are like some crusty elder brother, says our Lord, who, when the long-lost wanderer comes contritely home, is filled with bitter jealousy of the joyful reception he receives rather than with the generous delight that moves all human hearts at the recovery of the lost.

16. The effect, you see, is to place the Pharisaic objectors themselves in the category of sinners, side by side with the outcasts they had despised; to probe their hard hearts until they recognized their lost estate also; and so to bring them as themselves prodigals back in repentance to the Father's house. That they came back the parable does not say. It leaves them in the midst of bitter controversy with the Father because He is good. And here emerges a wonderful thing. That "seeking love" which is not signalized in the parable with reference to the lost--the confessedly lost--son, is brought before us in all its beautiful appeal with reference to these yet unrepentant elder brothers. For, you will observe, the father does not wait for the elder brother to come into the house to him; he goes out to him. He speaks soothing words to him in response to his outpouring of bitterness and disrespect. When, in outrageous words, this son celebrates his own righteousness and accuses the father of hardness and neglect, refusing indeed in his wrath to recognize his relationship either with him or his: the father responds with mild entreaties, addressing him tenderly as "child," proffering unbroken intercourse with him, endowing him with all his possessions,--in a word, pleading with him as only a loving father can. Did the elder son hearken to these soft reproofs and yield to this endearing appeal? It was for the Pharisees to answer that question. Our Lord leaves it there. And the effect of the whole is to show them that, contrary to their assumption, the Father in heaven has no righteous children on

earth; that His grace is needed for all, and most of all for those who dream they have no need of it. By thus skillfully dissecting, under the cover of the sour elder brother, the state of mind of the Pharisaic objectors, our Lord breaks down the artificial distinction by which they had separated themselves from their sinful brethren, and in doing so breaks down also the barriers which held their sympathies back and opens the way to full appreciation by them of the joy He would have them feel in the recovery of the lost. . . .

17. It would not be quite exact perhaps to say that the parable rebukes spiritual pride and jealousy as well as proclaims the joy in heaven over the recovery of the lost. Its lesson is one; and its one lesson is only thrown into a clearer light by the revelation of the dreadfulness of its contrast in jealousy of the good fortune of the saved. When all are in equal need of salvation, where is there room for censorious complaint of the goodness of God? When all are in equal need of salvation, where is there room for censorious complaint of the goodness of God? This levelling [*sic*] effect of the parable raises the question whether there is not contained in it some hint of the universalism of the Gospel. Surely through and through its structure sounds the note of, "For there is no difference!" No difference between the publicans and sinners on the one side, and the Pharisees and the Scribes on the other. . . .

18. But, however this may be, we approach nearer to the great lesson of the parable when we note that there is certainly imbedded in its teaching that great and inexpressibly moving truth that there is no depth of degradation, return from which will not be welcomed by God. A sinner may be too vile for any and every thing else; but he cannot be too vile for salvation. We observe at any rate that our Lord does not hold His hand when He comes to paint the degradation of sinners, through His picture of the degradation into which the lost son had sunk. No depths are left beneath the depths which He here portrays for us. This man had dealt with his inheritance with the utmost recklessness. He had wasted the whole of it until he was left stripped bare of all that he had brought from his

father's house. Nor was there anything to take its place. The country in which he had elected to dwell was smitten, throughout its whole extent, with a biting famine. In all its length and breadth there was nothing on which a man might live. The prodigal was reduced to "bend and pray and fawn" at the feet of a certain citizen of that dread land; and was sent by him out into the barren fields--to feed swine! To a Jew, degradation could not be more poignantly depicted. Yes, it could: there was one stage worse and that stage was reached. The lost son not only herded the swine; he herded with them. "He was fain to fill his belly from the husks that the swine did eat." Not with the same quality of food, observe, but from the swine's own store--for "no man gave unto him." In this terrible description of extreme degradation there may be a side glance at the actual state of the publicans, our Lord's reception of and association with whom was such an offence [sic] to the Jewish consciousness. For did not they not merely serve against their own people those swines of Gentiles, but actually feed themselves at their trough? But however this may be, it is clear that our Lord means to paint degradation in its depths. He does not spare the sinners with whom He consorted. His defence [sic] for receiving them does not turn upon any failure to recognize or feel their true quality; any representation of them as not so bad after all; as if they had been painted blacker than they were, and were nice enough people to associate with if only we were not so fastidious. He says rather that they are bad past expression and past belief. His defence [sic] is that they can be saved; and that He is here to save them. Lost? Yes, they are lost; and there is no reason why we should not take the word at the top--or rather at the bottom--of its meaning: this is the parable of the *lost* son. But Jesus is the Saviour of the lost; and there is none so lost that he may not be found by Him, and, being found by Him, be also found in Him. Oh, No! Jesus does not rejoice in sinners; it is not sin He loves nor sinners as sinners. What He rejoices in is the rescue of sinners from their sin. And the deeper the sin the greater the rescue and the greater the joy.

. . . "I say unto you, there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, rather than over ninety and nine just persons, such as have no need of repentance."

19. It is in this great declaration that the real purport of the parable is expressed. This parable was spoken to teach us, to put it briefly, that God in heaven rejoices over the repentance of every sinner that repents. It is a commentary therefore on those great passages which tell us that God would have no man perish, but all to come to Him and live; and it is more than a commentary on these passages, inasmuch as it throws the emphasis upon the positive side and tells us of the joy that God feels at the repentance of every sinner who repents. To the carrying of this great message home to our hearts all the art of the parable is directed, and it is our wisdom to read it simply to this end. We need not puzzle ourselves over the significance, then, of this detail or that, as if we were bound or indeed permitted to discover, allegorically, some spiritual meaning in each turn of the story. . . .

20. Thus, for instance, if we ask why there are only two sons in the parable, while there were ten pieces of silver in the preceding one, and a hundred sheep in the first one; the answer is that just two sons were needed to serve Jesus' purpose of illustrating the contrast between the Pharisees and Scribes on the one side and the publicans and sinners on the other; His purpose not being at all to indicate proportion of numbers, but difference in status and conduct. In the former parables the suggestion of comparative insignificance was requisite to bring out the full lesson; in this, the contrast of character serves His purpose. . . .

21. Enough that the story has a single point. And that point is the joy of the father at the return of the son, a joy which is the expression, not of the natural love of the father for a son, but of the overwhelming emotion of mingled relief and thankfulness and overmastering rapture which fills the heart of a father on the recovery of a lost son. The point of the narrative is not, then, that this prodigal is a son, though that underlies and gives its verisimilitude to the picture. The point is that this son is a prodigal. It is because

he has been lost and is now found that the joy of the father is so great. The elder son is a son too; and the father loves him also. Let him who doubts it read again the exquisite narrative of the father's tender and patient dealings with him. There is not in all literature a more beautiful picture of parental affection pleading with unfilial passion. . . . that soothing admonition, "Child, *thou*" (the emphasis on the "thou" must not be neglected) "art always with me; and all that is mine is thine; but it was meet to make merry and be glad, because this thy brother was dead and is alive, and was lost and is found"--is simply perfect. So clear is it that the lesson of the parable does not turn on the prodigal's being a son, but on this son being a prodigal.

22. In other words, its lesson is not that God loves His children, but that God loves sinners. And thus this parable is seen ranging with the preceding ones. The lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, have only this one thing in common, that they are lost; and the three parables unite in commending the one common lesson to us, that as men rejoice in the recovery of what is lost, so God rejoices in the recovery of sinners--since sinners are the things that to Him are lost. We must not, then, use this parable to prove that God is a father, or draw inferences from it as if that were its fundamental teaching. It does not teach that. What it teaches is that God will receive the returning sinner with the same joy that the father in the parable received the returning prodigal; because as this son was to that father's heart above all other things that he had lost, his lost one, and his return was therefore above all other things that might have been returned to him his recovery; so sinners are above all else that God has lost in the world His lost ones, and their return to Him above all other restorations that may be made to Him His recovery. The vivid picture of the father not staying to receive the returning son, but, moved with compassion as he spied him yet a great way off, running out to meet him and falling on his neck and kissing him in his ecstasy again and again; cutting short his words of confession with the command that the best robe be brought to clothe him, and shoes for his blistered feet, and a ring for his

finger, and the order that the fatted calf be killed and the feast be spread, and the music and the dance be prepared--because, as he says, "This my son was dead and is alive, was lost and is found"--all this in the picture is meant to quicken our hearts to some apprehension of the joy that fills God's heart at the return of sinners to Him.

O brethren, our minds are dulled with much repetition, and refuse to take the impression our Lord would make on them. But even we--can we fail to be moved with wonder today at this great message, that God in heaven rejoices--exults in joy like this human father receiving back his son--when sinners repent and turn to Him? On less assurance than that of Jesus Christ Himself the thing were perhaps incredible. But on that assurance shall we not take its comfort to our hearts? We are sinners. And our only hope is in one who loves sinners; and has come into the world to die for sinners. Marvel, marvel beyond our conception; but, blessed be God, as true as marvellous [sic]. And when we know Him better, perhaps it may more and more cease to be a marvel. . . .

That He should leave His place on high,

And come for sinful man to die,

You count it strange?--so do not I,

Since I have known my Saviour.

Nay, had there been in all this wide

Wide world no other soul beside

But only mine, then He had died

That He might be its Saviour; . . .

Is that too high a flight for us--that passion of appropriation by which the love of Jesus for me--my own personal soul--is appreciated so fully that it seems natural to us that He, moved by that great love that was in Him for me--even me--should leave His throne that He might die for me,--just me,--even were there none else beside? At least we may assent to the dispassionate recognition that in the depths of our parable is hidden the

revelation of that fundamental characteristic of Jesus Christ by virtue of which He did become the Saviour at least of sinners. And seeing this and knowing ourselves to be sinners, we may acknowledge Him afresh today as our Saviour, and at least gratefully join in our passionate sinner's prayer:

And oh! that He fulfilled may see
 The travail of His soul in me,
 And with His work contented be,
 As I am with my Saviour!
 Yea, living, dying, let me bring
 My strength, my solace from this spring,
 That He who lives to be my King,
 Once died to be my Saviour!

Questions and Tasks:

1. Does Warfield's sermon seem more like Gregory's, Luther's, or Schleiermacher's? Why? Which of the theologians we have studied so far seems to stay closest to the text in his sermon? How?
2. Read the sermon again, this time underlining the words *teach, teaching, lesson, point, message, truth, and doctrine*. As you do so, also list some of the *lessons, teachings, doctrine*, etc. that Warfield seems to find (or find lacking) in the Luke parable; jot down the paragraph numbers where you find such teachings mentioned.
3. In this sermon Warfield does not define any words for us as Schleiermacher did. Does he, like Schleiermacher, seem to interpret the parts of his text in relationship to the whole and the whole in relationship to the parts? Cite an example.
4. Does Warfield try to get at the intent of the writer or speaker? Cite an example.

5. Warfield wrote that, "Authority, intellect, and the heart are the three sides of the triangle of truth. . . . [truth] must be: first, revealed in an authoritative word; second, experienced in a holy heart; and third, formulated by a sanctified intellect."³ Does the "truth" Warfield comes to in this sermon seem to balance authority, intellect, and heart? How or how not?

³ Warfield, "Authority, Intellect, Heart," in Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield, vol.2, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1973), 671.

Handout 6

Sermon of Karl Barth
"Remember the Lord"¹

A Few Notes:

After W.W.II Karl Barth preached occasionally to inmates at the prison in Basel, Switzerland. He began this ministry in 1954 and continued it for ten years. The sermon in this handout was preached at the prison on December 29, 1957. The italics in the copy below were in the Harper and Brothers edition.

Instructions:

Read Deuteronomy 8. The text of this sermon is from verse 18 of the chapter. The beginning and ending prayers are Barth's and he wanted them included with the sermons. Read the prayers and sermon out loud. After reading Barth's work, answer the questions that follow.

O Lord, our God! Our years come and go. We ourselves live and die. But thou art forever. Thy kingdom and thy faithfulness, thy righteousness and thy mercy are without beginning and end. Thou art likewise the origin and destination of our lives. Thou art the judge of our thoughts, words and deeds.

We acknowledge with contrite hearts today that we have so often forgotten thee, denied thee, offended thee. And yet we are comforted and enlightened anew by thy assurance that thou art our Father and we are thy children, because thy dear Son Jesus Christ was made man, died and rose for us, and is our brother.

¹ Karl Barth, "Remember the Lord," in Deliverance to the Captives, trans. Marguerite Weiser (New York: Harper and Bros., 1961), 109-16. Used by permission.

We give thee thanks that we may once more announce and hear these glad tidings on this last Sunday of the year. Make us free, O Lord, to say what is right and rightly to receive it, that this hour may further thy glory and the peace and salvation of us all. Amen.

"Our Father . . . "

You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power.

Deuteronomy 8:18

1. My dear brothers and sisters, how I wish I could utter and you could hear this "It is he!" in such a way that it would shine brighter than a thousand suns, blinding our eyes so we could perceive nothing else for a moment. Then our eyes would be opened to an entirely fresh vision of God's eternity surrounding our humanity, God's ways determining our human ways, God's truth containing what we hold for truth, and God's life sustaining our human lives.

2. But whether my preaching is good or bad, whether your understanding is deep or shallow, what it is all about, what is laid out before us and may be grasped by every man is this: "It is he who gives you power!" You don't give power to yourself. No one else can give it to you. Not even the best of circumstances or the fulfillment of your highest dreams can give it to you. It is he who gives you power.

3. This text stands in one of the most beautiful and moving chapters of the Old Testament. I should like to invite you to open your Bibles when you are alone again and reread it (it is the 8th chapter of Deuteronomy). The text is addressed to the people of Israel. The long and strenuous journey through the desert is behind them, and the promised land of their forefathers lies before their eyes. These people are now told: "Do not imagine you succeeded in this venture for yourselves! No, it is the Lord, your God, who tested you in the wilderness and at the same time sustained you. It is the Lord, your

God, who has given you this good land. Therefore you shall remember him. It is he who gives you power."

4. But now, let us hear this word quite directly addressed to ourselves. For isn't it true that the journey which lies behind us at the end of this year and the journeys of all previous years somehow fit the description of this chapter? We too wandered through "the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water." And isn't it equally true that we are on the threshold of a future where things will be good, even very good, for us? It is a future where we all may sigh with relief, where we all shall be comforted and quickened. Likewise, we are all reminded in this moment of looking back and of looking ahead not to forget but to remember that it is he who gives us power. All the hardships we may have endured in the past would have been suffered in vain, and all the hope with which we look out into the promised future would be an illusion were we to forget, were we not to remember that it is he who gives us power. But why should we forget this truth? We have no reason to. Why shouldn't we remember it and hold fast? We have every reason to do so!

5. "You shall remember the *Lord, your God!*" We are not asked to remember God in general. We are in constant temptation to think of some abstraction when we pronounce or hear the word "God." We think of the highest, the deepest, the absolute, the ultimate. But this highest and perhaps ultimate force might be merely fate's powerful coercion and manipulation. So, too, it might be some majestic mystery reigning way above the stars or dwelling in our own hearts. So, too, it might be a purely human invention. To believe that this "God," this abstract God, gives us power is likely to be a thoroughly uncertain business. Where would he get it from? How could he be the Lord? How could he be your God? Yes, even if he were your God, the result might be terrible, for this "God" might well turn out to be a malicious Lord, the worst enemy of yourself and of us all.

6. The *Lord*, *your* God is a God with a name, a face, a personality. His name, face and personality assure us that he is indeed stern, yet good and faithful, a God whom we used to call as children, and still may call today, a "Dear" God. He is a God who can dispense with, and dispenses us from, the human attempt to form an opinion or elaborate a theory about him. He is indeed the God who has told us long ago and tells us time and again how and what *we shall think of him*. Strangely enough, he does so by revealing what *he thinks of us*. He might well have belittling and disparaging thoughts about us. Yet these are barred from his mind. He thinks indeed very highly of us! Because we are such excellent people? No, even though we are not excellent at all! Perhaps because he is in need of us? No, he does not need us. He could quite easily do without us. He thinks so highly of us because he is deeply moved by our need of him, our bitter, inescapable need. Is his perhaps the casualness and condescension of a great ruler, occasionally bending down to the man in the street? Not in the least. He takes our place and surrenders himself for us, thereby binding himself to us and compromising himself with us once for all. He is the God of Christmas of whom we sing:

A tiny child and poor he came

To give us mercy's blessing.

This is the height and the depth, the ultimate and eternal power and glory of the almighty *Lord*: he has mercy on us. Having mercy on you and on me, he is *your* God and *my* God. Because he is compassionate, it is not particularly difficult, but the most natural thing in the world to believe in him, to hope for him and to love him, and to love our neighbour accordingly. It is he, *this* God who gives you power.

7. *He give you power!* Power is know-how, skill, freedom to do something. It is our human predicament that we should know how to do so many things we can't do, that we need so much power and strength we don't have. We need strength to live, and we need even more strength to die. I am not thinking so much at this point of what will

happen to us at the end of our days as of the failures and defaults of all human life, from its very beginnings. We need strength to be young, and we need even more strength to grow up and to grow old.

8. We need strength not to grow bitter and not to despair in the disappointments of life and in times of bad luck. We need even more strength not to become wanton, vain and foolish when things go well and good luck is with us. We need strength to withstand the temptations all too well known to us, and we may need even greater strength not to become self-sufficient, loveless Pharisees when we do withstand them. We certainly need strength to be imprisoned as you are in this house but, believe me, we may even need more strength to be free and to make good use of our freedom. We need strength to get along with our fellowmen who may get on our nerves and annoy us, and perhaps we need greater strength to get along with ourselves, to live in peace with ourselves day by day and year by year. Yes, we need many and manifold kinds of strength, all effective and unfailing, yet we lack them. We cannot provide strength ourselves. Nor can anybody else give it to us. The urgent exhortation: "You must, you ought to!" is in vain. What we need is the strength only he can give who is the source of all power and strength. He does not want to keep it for himself, but wants to give it to us and indeed does give it to us.

9. I am certainly in no position to describe how this happens. How could God's giving of his own, of what is his, be described? One thing is certain: he gives us the power and strength we need in our human weakness, yours and mine, precisely when we are at our wit's end. When it happens, it will always be an unexpected event. God always gives us strength for one leg of the journey at a time. At each stage we are promised that he will continue to provide additional and greater strength as needed on our way into the future. The powers we receive each time somehow enable us to do the very things we had been incapable of doing so far. God does not distribute the full ration all at once. He apportions it from one day to the next. You will not be a rock of strength overnight.

Neither will you remain a weakling, worth nothing but writhing, throwing up your hands in despair and falling on your face (that will happen often enough!). God gives you strength and power to become a man, modestly yet determinedly, who goes his way, humbly yet courageously, and is strong and grateful: strong because it is God's almighty grace for which he is grateful.

10. The Lord your God does all these things, he gives you the strength and power you need and lack, as surely as he has compassion on us, as surely as he has already cared for us in the manger of Bethlehem and on the cross of Golgotha, as surely as in Jesus Christ we are his children whom he never forgets or tires of remembering.

11. Therefore, you too, *remember* the Lord your God! My dear friends, we all are peculiar customers of God--myself included even before all others, as I readily admit. We are people who time and again are blind to the fact that it is he who gives us power, who time and again are careless and not in the least grateful, who are reluctant to receive with empty, outstretched hands what he gives, what he alone possesses and alone is able and willing to give: the power and strength we need yet lack so desperately. Yes, we are these peculiar customers of our God. This confession, however, must not be our last word.

12. Remember the Lord, your God! This means: awake from the sleep of your great thoughtlessness! Awake from the happy or unhappy dreams and the countless thoughts that wander through your mind! Awake to the insight and knowledge that it is he who gives you power! If you do awake, the question will inevitably occur to you: "How on earth could I forget him? How could I consider everything else more important than him? How could I push myself so much to the center of things? How could I measure all and everything according to my desires and values? As if I were the Greenwich Observatory with its meridian dividing East and West? How could I, really?" But then don't waste time. Quickly drive this one nail into the wall: "It is he!" and quickly hang everything on it. He is the number "one" before all the zeros, the one behind which all these zeros may alone

mean anything. He measures according to his unfailing rule. He judges justly. Above all, he and he alone gives what we need. He possesses it. He is its very source. He will not keep it from us. To remember *this* is to *remember* the Lord!

13. I am sure that if you do this, if you remember the Lord your God, the power he gives you--like the water from the rock touched by Moses' rod--begins to trickle, to flow, to rush into your heart and into your life, carrying with it comfort, joy and peace for this coming year and all the following years, power to you, precisely to you!

14. You might ask me now whether and how we can remember the Lord. Two answers to these questions by way of conclusion.

15. Remembering the Lord, like all good things, must be begun, repeated and practiced. You ask me how to begin, how to repeat, how to practice this remembrance? In reply I point to the Christian community, even as it exists in this house. I was once asked here in a discussion what the "Church" really was. I might now give the plainest answer. The Church is our common attempt to remember our God. We remember the Lord when we preach and hear the sermon. We remember the Lord when, as we did at Christmas, we celebrate the Lord's Supper, where it becomes tangible, so to speak, that it is he who feeds and nourishes us and gives us strength. We remember the Lord when we sing (with understanding!) the hymns of our hymnals and when we read the Bible, as indeed we may and we must do, perhaps the 90th Psalm beginning with these words: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." Or the 103rd Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!" Or the wonderful 23rd Psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want!" But I would have to quote the whole Bible which tells me on each page that "it is he who gives your power!" Have you seriously tried all these things? And will you then seriously say: "I cannot remember the Lord, my God?"

16. However--and this is my second answer--even in worship, even during the sermon, even with hymnal and Bible in hand, it does not happen at will that we are able to remember the Lord. Nothing will come of it unless he himself gives us power to remember him. Over and above all we might contribute ourselves, we must pray that he grants us this power. We certainly may pray for it. And with great confidence I assure you that you may not only believe, you may also *know* that this is true--the Lord our God has never failed anyone who prayed for power and strength to remember him. Amen.

Dear Father in Jesus Christ, thy Son, our brother and Lord!

You have brought us together here.

Remain with us, we ask,

and accompany each one of us to his own place when we depart.

Do not abandon anyone.

Do not let anyone become completely lost.

Above all, do not let any of us forget you, fail to remember you.

Lighten, comfort and strengthen also our loved ones near and far,

our friends, and even more our enemies.

Before you we would lay the known and unknown

sorrows, needs, and necessities of all people:

those of the Christian Church at home and abroad;

those of the men and women called to debate, advise, govern,

and decide the destinies of East and West;

those of the humiliated and exploited near and far,

those of the poor, the sick, the old,

the embittered, the disheartened, and the perplexed.

Indeed we lay before you the sorrows, needs, and necessities

of the whole world longing for justice, freedom and peace.
Let many, let all, and thus let us
experience that we are in the hands of your almighty grace,
which will ultimately bring an end to all injustice and misery
and create a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness shall dwell!
Glory be to you, O God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
who were from the beginning
and are still today,
and will be yet to come, now and for evermore. Amen.²

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Barth describe human experience in this sermon? How does Barth describe God's actions? Where does the emphasis seem to be, upon human experience or upon God's activity? Point out paragraphs that illustrate your answer.
2. Are there any doctrines mentioned or implied in this sermon? Illustrate.
3. Does Barth seem to interpret this text in light of the whole as Schleiermacher recommends? Does he speak of a whole in relationship to this text? Illustrate.
4. Does Barth refer to anything that you understand to be a reoccurring theme in the Bible? Give an example.
5. If the sermon was preached to your congregation this past Sunday (or even if you only read it aloud), did your heart burn within you as you heard it? Did you get a glimpse of God's self-revelation as you listened? Did you simply understand the text better?

² I have updated the language of the closing prayer and put it into phrasing lines because we will be praying it aloud together in class.

Handout 7a

Sermon of Paul Tillich
 "The New Being"¹

Notes and Instructions

Most of Tillich's sermon's were preached in college and university chapels. "The New Being" was preached sometime before 1955. Tillich's text for this sermon is Galatians 6:15, but read 6:12-15 and II Corinthians 5:16-17 as well. As with the sermons we have considered thus far, read "The New Being" out loud. Then answer the questions that follow.

For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

Galatians 6:15

1. If I were asked to sum up the Christian message for our time in two words, I would say with Paul: It is the message of a "New Creation." We have read something of the New Creation in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Let me repeat one of his sentences in the words of an exact translation: "If anyone is in union with Christ he is a new being; the old state of things has passed away; there is a new state of things." Christianity is the message of the New Creation, the New Being, the New Reality which has appeared with the appearance of Jesus who for this reason, and just for this reason, is called the Christ. For the Christ, the Messiah, the selected and anointed one is He who brings the new state of things.

2. We all live in the old state of things, and the question asked of us by our text is whether we *also* participate in the new state of things. We belong to the Old Creation, and

¹ Paul Tillich, "The New Being," in The Essential Tillich, ed. F. Forrester Church (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987), 90-97. Used by permission. Italics in the above text are in the Church edition.

the demand made upon us by Christianity is that we also participate in the New Creation. We have known ourselves in our old being, and we shall ask ourselves in this hour whether we also have experienced something of a New Being in ourselves.

3. What is this New Being? Paul answers first by saying what it is *not*. It is neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision, he says. For Paul and for the readers of his letter this meant something very definite. It meant that neither to be a Jew nor to be a pagan is ultimately important; that only one thing counts, namely, the union with Him in whom the New Reality is present. Circumcision or uncircumcision--what does that mean for *us*? It can also mean something very definite, but at the same time something very universal. It means that no religion as such produces the New Being. Circumcision is a religious rite, observed by the Jews: sacrifices are religious rites, observed by the pagans: baptism is a religious rite, observed by the Christians. All these rites do not matter--only a New Creation. And since these rites stand, in the words of Paul, for the whole religion to which they belong, we can say: No religion matters--only a new state of things. Let us think about this striking assertion of Paul. What it says first is that Christianity is more than a religion; it is the message of a New Creation. Christianity as a religion is not important--it is like circumcision or like uncircumcision: no more, no less! Are we able even to imagine the consequences of the apostolic pronouncement for our situation? Christianity in the present world encounters several forms of circumcision and uncircumcision. Circumcision can stand today for everything called religion, uncircumcision for everything called secular, but making half-religious claims. There are the great religions beside Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and the remnants of classical Judaism; they have their myths and their rites--so to speak their "circumcision"--which gives each of them their distinction. There are the secular movements: Fascism and Communism, Secular Humanism, and Ethical Idealism. They try to avoid myths and rites; they represent, so to speak, uncircumcision. Nevertheless, they also claim ultimate truth and demand complete

devotion. How shall Christianity face them? Shall Christianity tell them: Come to us, we are a better religion, our kind of circumcision or uncircumcision is higher than yours? Shall we praise Christianity, our way of life, the religious as well as the secular? Shall we make of the Christian message a success story, and tell them, like advertisers: try it with us, and you will see how important Christianity is for everybody? Some missionaries and some ministers and some Christian laymen use these methods. They show a total misunderstanding of Christianity. The apostle who was a missionary and a minister and a layman all at once says something different. He says: No particular religion matters, neither ours nor yours. But I want to tell you that something has happened that matters, something that judges you and me, your religion and my religion. A New Creation has occurred, a New Being has appeared; and we are all asked to participate in it. And so we should say to the pagans and Jews wherever we meet them: Don't compare your religion and our religion, your rites and our rites, your prophets and our prophets, your priests and our priests, the pious amongst you, and the pious amongst us. All of this is of no avail! And above all don't think that we want to convert you to English or American Christianity, to the religion of the Western World. We do not want to convert you to us, not even to the best of us. This would be of no avail. We want only to show you something we have seen and to tell you something we have heard: That in the midst of the old creation there is a New Creation, and that this New Creation is manifest in Jesus who is called the Christ.

4. And when we meet Fascists and Communists, Scientific Humanists and Ethical Idealists, we should say to them: Don't boast too much that you have no rites and myths, that you are free from superstitions, that you are perfectly reasonable, uncircumcised in every sense. In the first place, you also have your rites and myths, your bit of circumcision; they are even very important to you. But if you were completely free from them you would have no reason to point to your *uncircumcision*. It is of no avail. Don't think that we want to convert you away from your secular state to a religious state, that we

want to make you religious and members of a very high religion, the Christian, and of a very great denomination within it, namely, our own. This would be of no avail. We want only to communicate to you an experience we have had that here and there in the world and now and then in ourselves is a New Creation, usually hidden, but sometimes manifest, and certainly manifest in Jesus who is called the Christ.

5. This is the way we should speak to all those outside the Christian realm, whether they are religious or secular. And we should not be too worried about the Christian religion, about the state of the Churches, about membership and doctrines, about institutions and ministers, about sermons and sacraments. This is circumcision; and the lack of it, the secularization which today is spreading all over the world is uncircumcision. Both are nothing, of no importance, if the ultimate question is asked, the question of a New Reality. *This* question, however, is of infinite importance. We should worry more about it than about anything else between heaven and earth. The New Creation--this is our ultimate concern; this should be our infinite passion--the infinite passion of every human being. This matters; this alone matters ultimately. In comparison with it everything else, even religion or nonreligion, even Christianity or non-Christianity, matters very little--and ultimately nothing.

6. And now let me boast for a moment about the fact that we are Christians and let us become fools by boasting, as Paul called himself when he started boasting. It is the greatness of Christianity that it can see how small it is. The importance of being a Christian is that we can stand the insight that it is of no importance. It is the spiritual power of religion that he who is religious can fearlessly look at the vanity of religion. It is the maturest fruit of Christian understanding to understand that Christianity, as such, is of no avail. This is boasting, not personal boasting, but boasting about Christianity. As boasting it is foolishness. But as boasting about the fact that there is nothing to boast about, it is wisdom and maturity. Having as having not--this is the right attitude toward

everything great and wonderful in life, even religion and Christianity. But it is not the right attitude toward the New Creation. Toward it the right attitude is passionate and infinite longing.

7. And now we ask again: What is this New Being? The New Being is not something that simply takes the place of the Old Being. But it is a renewal of the Old which has been corrupted, distorted, split and almost destroyed. But not wholly destroyed. Salvation does not destroy creation; but it transforms the Old Creation into a New one. Therefore we can speak of the New in terms of a *re*-newal: The threefold "*re*," namely, *re*-conciliation, *re*-union, *re*-surrection.

8. In his letter, Paul combines New Creation with reconciliation. The message of reconciliation is: *Be* reconciled to God. Cease to be hostile to Him, for He is never hostile to you. The message of reconciliation is not that God needs to be reconciled. How could He be? Since He is the source and power of reconciliation, who could reconcile Him? Pagans and Jews and Christians--all of us have tried and are trying to reconcile Him by rites and sacraments, by prayers and services, by moral behavior and works of charity. But if we try this, if we try to give something to Him, to show good deeds which may appease Him, we fail. It is never enough; we never can satisfy Him because there is an infinite demand upon us. And since we cannot appease Him, we grow hostile toward Him. Have you ever noticed how much hostility against God dwells in the depths of the good and honest people, in those who excel in works of charity, in piety and religious zeal? This cannot be otherwise; for one is hostile, consciously or unconsciously, toward those by whom one feels rejected. Everybody is in this predicament, whether he calls that which rejects him "God," or "nature," or "destiny," or "social conditions." Everybody carries a hostility toward the existence into which he has been thrown, toward the hidden powers which determine his life and that of the universe, toward that which makes him guilty and that threatens him with destruction because he has become guilty. We all feel rejected and

hostile toward what has rejected us. We all try to appease it and in failing, we become more hostile. This happens often unnoticed by ourselves. But there are two symptoms which we hardly can avoid noticing: The hostility against ourselves and the hostility against others. One speaks so often of pride and arrogance and self-certainty and complacency in people. But this is, in most cases, the superficial level of their being. Below this, in a deeper level, there is self-rejection, disgust, and even hatred of one's self. Be reconciled to God: that means at the same time, be reconciled to ourselves. But we are not; we try to appease ourselves. We try to make ourselves more acceptable to our own judgment and, when we fail, we grow more hostile toward ourselves. And he who feels rejected by God and who rejects himself feels also rejected by the others. As he grows hostile toward destiny and hostile toward himself, he also grows hostile toward other men. If we are often horrified by the unconscious or conscious hostility people betray toward us or about our own hostility toward people whom we believe we love, let us not forget: They feel rejected by us; we feel rejected by them. They tried hard to make themselves acceptable to us, and they failed. We tried hard to make ourselves acceptable to them, and we failed. And their and our hostility grew. Be reconciled with God--that means, at the same time, be reconciled with the others! But it does *not* mean try to reconcile the others, as it does not mean try to reconcile yourselves. Try to reconcile God. You will fail. This is the message: A new reality has appeared in which you *are* reconciled. To enter the New Being we do not need to show anything. We must only be open to be grasped by it, although we have nothing to show.

9. Being reconciled--that is the first mark of the New Reality. And being reunited is its second mark. Reconciliation makes reunion possible. The New Creation is the reality in which the separated is reunited. The New Being is manifest in the Christ because in Him the separation never overcame the unity between Him and God, between Him and mankind, between Him and Himself. This gives His picture in the Gospels its

overwhelming and inexhaustible power. In Him we look at a human life that maintained the union in spite of everything that drove Him into separation. He represents and mediates the power of the New Being because He represents and mediates the power of an undisrupted union. Where the New Reality appears, one feels united with God, the ground and meaning of one's existence. One has what has been called the love of one's destiny, and what, today, we might call the courage to take upon ourselves our own anxiety. Then one has the astonishing experience of feeling reunited with one's self, not in pride and false self-satisfaction, but in a deep self-acceptance. One accepts one's self as something which is eternally important, eternally loved, eternally accepted. The disgust at one's self, the hatred of one's self has disappeared. There is a center, a direction, a meaning for life. All healing--bodily and mental--creates this reunion of one's self with one's self. Where there is real healing, *there* is the New Being, the New Creation. But real healing is not where only a part of body or mind is reunited with the whole, but where the whole itself, our whole being, our whole personality is united with itself. The New Creation is healing creation because it creates reunion with oneself. And it creates reunion with the others. Nothing is more distinctive of the Old Being than the separation of man from man. Nothing is more passionately demanded than social healing, than the New Being within history and human relationships. Religion and Christianity are under strong accusation that they have not brought reunion into human history. Who could deny the truth of this challenge. Nevertheless, mankind still lives: and it could not live any more if the power of separation had not been permanently conquered by the power of reunion, of healing, of the New Creation. Where one is grasped by a human face as human, although one has to overcome personal distaste or racial strangeness, or national conflicts, or the differences of sex, of age, of beauty, of strength, of knowledge, and all the other innumerable causes of separation--*there* New Creation happens! Mankind lives because this happens again and again. And if the Church which is the assembly of God has an ultimate significance, this is

its significance: That here the reunion of man to man is pronounced and confessed and realized, even if in fragments and weaknesses and distortions. The Church is the place where the reunion of man with man is an actual event, though the Church of God is permanently betrayed by the Christian churches. But, although betrayed and expelled, the New Creation saves and preserves that by which it is betrayed and expelled: churches, mankind and history.

10. The Church, like all its members, relapses from the New into the Old Being. Therefore, the third mark of the New Creation is re-surrection. The word "resurrection" has for many people the connotation of dead bodies leaving their graves or other fanciful images. But resurrection means the victory of the New state of things, the New Being born out of the death of the Old. Resurrection is not an event that might happen in some remote future, but it is the power of the New Being to create life out of death, here and now, today and tomorrow. Where there is a New Being, *there* is resurrection, namely the creation into eternity out of every moment of time. The Old Being has the mark of disintegration and death. The New Being puts a new mark over the old one. Out of disintegration and death something is born of eternal significance. That which is immersed in dissolution emerges in a New Creation. Resurrection happens *now*, or it does not happen at all. It happens in us and around us, in soul and history, in nature and universe.

11. Reconciliation, reunion, resurrection--this is the New Creation, the New Being, the New state of things. Do we participate in it? The message of Christianity is not Christianity, but a New Reality. A New state of things has appeared, it still appears; it is hidden and visible, it is there and it is here. Accept it, enter into it, let it grasp you.

Questions and Tasks

1. What was your immediate reaction to this sermon? Did you find the language exciting?
unclear? unbiblical? engaging? Circle one or more and add any adjectives that occur to you. Go back over the sermon and underline words or phrases that were new for you or which need to be explained.
2. Which of the theologians we have studied seems closest to Tillich? Why?
3. Do you agree with Tillich that Christianity's message is not that it is a better religion but that it points to the truth of New Being? Why or why not?
4. Paragraphs 8 describes the human situation as one of separation, rejection, and hostility. Do you agree with this assessment? Where is the description lacking?
5. Do re-conciliation, re-union, and re-surrection seem to you to sum up the person of Jesus Christ? Is New Being a good term, or would you suggest something else? Have you occasionally experienced New Being? Describe the situation in which it occurred?
6. Would this sermon appeal to our congregation? How would it have to be changed in order to do so? Would it appeal to Generation X? How would it have to be changed in order to do so?

Handout 7b

My mother frequently told the following story when I was a child. "Big Mike" was my father, though he was never called by that name except in this story. I did not experience the event; it happened to my half-brother and sisters, long before I was born.

--Louise Row

The Story of Big Mike and Little Mike

Big Mike was a Presbyterian minister who pastored three small country churches in northern Louisiana. Big Mike had three children but no wife, because she had died a year or so earlier. Big Mike had to preach and visit people and hold Wednesday prayer meetings and cook and clean the house and tend to his three children all alone. The children were named Dorothea (she was eight), Little Mike (who was six), and June (only four). Big Mike was full of energy and fun to be with, and the children loved him dearly. But Big Mike was away doing his job much of the time, and, when he was at home, he was busy cooking and cleaning and supervising everything. He did not have much time to play with the children. In addition, the children missed their mother very much and often became sad.

One summer day Mr. John Millard's wife called and invited Big Mike and the children for dinner. Mr. John Millard was an elder in one of the small churches. He and many of the families in the area made it a point to invite Big Mike and his children for dinner; it was one way that they could help their pastor and enjoy him at the same time.

Late in the afternoon Big Mike and the children drove down to the ferry landing and took the boat across the Red River to Mr. John Millard's house on the other side. As they were going across the river, Big Mike showed the children how to skip rocks across the water; they were not very good at it.

Everyone had a fine time at dinner; Mrs. Millard's meal was very good, and Big Mike made everyone laugh with his funny stories. When it was time to go home, Mr. and Mrs. Millard asked Little Mike if he would like to spend the night with them. They were especially fond of Little Mike. Little Mike had never slept away from home before, but he liked the Millards very much and felt very grown up to be asked to stay the night. He nodded and said that he would very much like to stay with the Millards.

Big Mike, however, was a little uncertain about things. "Remember, son," he said, "if you decide to stay, you cannot change your mind. The ferry stops running at 9:00 p.m. and there will be no way for me to come after you."

But Little Mike said that he was sure he would not change his mind. Mr. Millard said that he would bring Little Mike to the church sometime the next morning. Good-byes and thank-you's were said, and Big Mike took Dorothea and June and crossed over the Red River on the last ferry of the evening.

About 11:00 p.m. Mr. Millard called to say that Little Mike was crying and crying and that they had done everything they could to comfort him, but nothing seemed to work. Big Mike thought a while and then he had an idea.

"John, I think that Tom Jacobs has been leaving his rowboat tied just upstream from the ferry. I'll drive over and see if I can find that boat, and then I'll row over. You drive Little Mike to the ferry landing on your side and wait for me."

The night was dark, and the Red River was deep, but Big Mike rowed over to the other side to get his son. Little Mike was glad to see Big Mike, and two hugged and kissed each other. Then they got into the row boat, and Big Mike rowed back across the river. They drove home, and Little Mike got into his bed and went right to sleep. Dorothea and June were happy too.

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As I mentioned at the outset, the above event did not happen to me; I participated in it only through hearing about it from my mother. I nonetheless experienced a sense of peace about my dad whenever the story was told. My own children have also loved the story.

Think back over your own life. Have you ever had a healing or reassuring experience of some kind--perhaps a special dream or an event like the one experienced by the Dorothea, June and Little Mike of this story? Have you ever felt healed or comforted by hearing someone else share a special experience? Have you ever felt healed or comforted by reading scripture? Jot down your memories on this page. There probably will not be time to share your experiences in class, but have your own experiences fresh in your minds.

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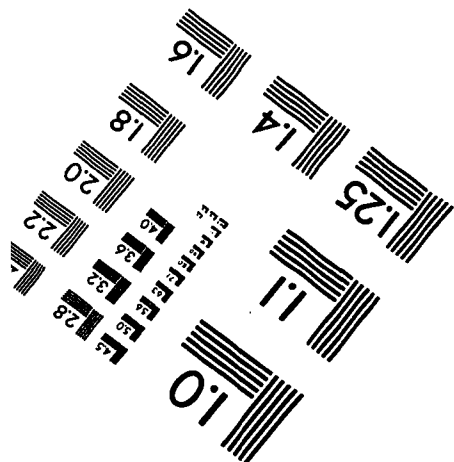
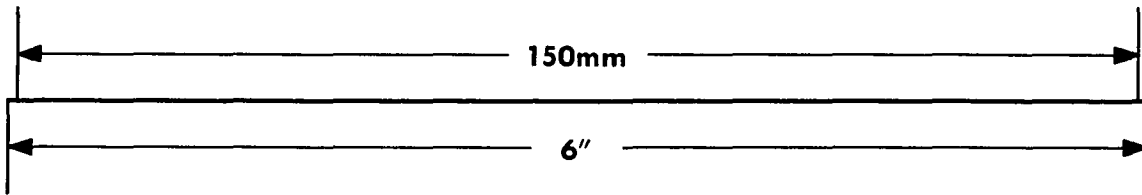
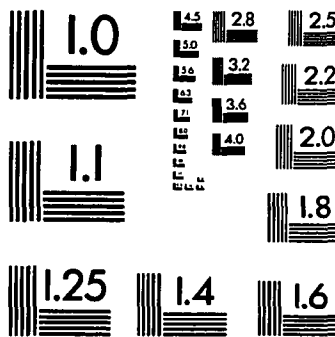
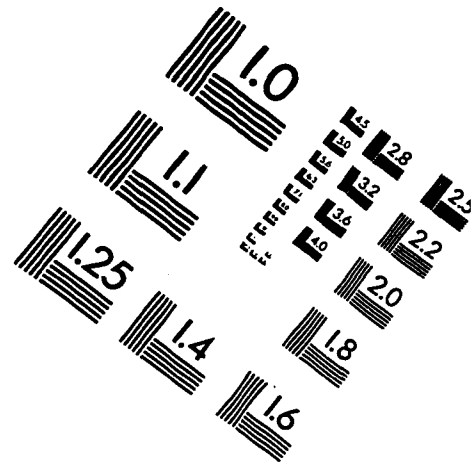
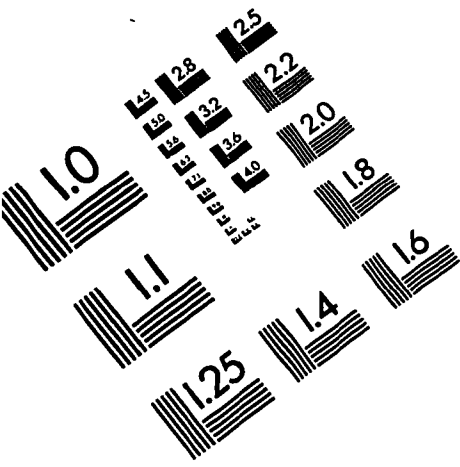
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